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THE FAITHS
VARIETIES OF CHRISTIAN
EXPRESSION

Edited by **L. P. JACKS,**
M.A., LL.D.

CONGREGATIONALISM

CONGREGATIONALISM

BY

W. B. SELBIE, D.D.

PRINCIPAL OF MANSFIELD COLLEGE, OXFORD



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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

MADE IN CHINA

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

A WORD of explanation seems to be needed in regard to the title and the sub-title which have been chosen for this series.

There is *one* faith, says St. Paul ; but the title of the series indicates more than one. A difficulty unquestionably exists at that point. It has not been overlooked.

Had the promoters of this series adopted the former point of view and called it "the Faith" instead of "the Faiths", they would have answered in advance an important question which the series itself should be left to answer. But, equally, by calling the series "the Faiths", instead of "the Faith", have they not prejudged the question in another way ?

Of the two positions the latter seemed the less dogmatic. Let us take the world as we find it, in which the Faiths show themselves as a plurality, and then, if they are really one, or many varieties of the same, or if only one is true and the rest false, let the fact appear from the accounts they give of themselves.

On no other terms could full liberty have been accorded to the writers who contribute to the

series ; on no other terms could the task of editing the series be fairly carried out. It would have been obviously unfair to demand of each of the contributors that he should exhibit the faith that is in him as ultimately identical with the faith that is in each of his fellow-contributors. It would have been obviously unfair to deny to any contributor the right to exhibit his own faith as the only true faith and all the rest as false. It would have been obviously unfair to assume that faith is necessarily singular because St. Paul so describes it. For the degree of authority to be attributed to the words of St. Paul is precisely one of the points on which the contributors to the series must be allowed to differ and to speak for themselves.

The same considerations apply to the sub-title of the series—"Varieties of Christian Expression". It may be that Christianity has only *one* mode of expression, and that it ceases to be Christianity when expressed in any other way. But to take that for granted would ill become the editor of such a series as this, and it would become him still worse if he deliberately planned the series so as to lead up to that conclusion. Again we must take the world as we find it. Among those who claim to be Christians many varieties of expression unquestionably exist which may or may not be only different ways of expressing the same original truth. So far as the editor is concerned this must be left an open question. If to some writers in the series it should

seem good to deny the name of Christian to those whose modes of expression differ from their own, they must not be precluded from doing so, and the reader will judge for himself between the claim and the counter-claim. Certainly the hope is entertained that from the presentation of differences in this series there may emerge some unities hitherto unsuspected or dimly seen ; but that will be as it may. The issue is not to be forced.

To present a complete logical justification of our title and sub-title is perhaps not possible, and such justification as we have here offered will probably commend itself only to the pragmatic mind. But objections taken to these titles will be found on examination to be objections to the series itself. How, we might ask, can any earnest and eminent Christian, believing his own variety of Christian expression to be better than the rest, logically justify his co-operation, in such a series as this, with other earnest and eminent Christians whose beliefs in that matter run counter to his own ? None the less they are here co-operating.

That such co-operation has been found possible may be reckoned one of the signs of the times. The explanation of it lies, not in logic, but in charity.

L. P. JACKS

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

IN the endless discussions which have taken place on the reunion of Christendom it has often been urged that the desired end is never likely to be furthered by any slurring, or minimizing, of the difference between the various branches of the Christian Church. Indeed, the more intelligently and conscientiously Christians hold the tenets of their particular Church, the more are they likely to sympathize with, and understand, the position of others. The present volume is one of a series, and its aim is to present a positive statement of the religious values for which Congregationalism has stood and stands. To do this within the limits prescribed is to attempt an almost impossible task, and I am only too conscious that I have not been able to paint the large canvas that the subject requires. I hope, however, that I may have done something to confirm Congregationalists in the faith and principles of their order, and to present these, at least, intelligibly to those outside. I have written in no sectarian spirit, and I have not hesitated to be critical. At the same time I have written in the full conviction that there is in Congregationalism something essentially Christian, and

something well calculated to meet the peculiar religious needs and difficulties of our time.

I have to thank my friend, Dr. Albert Peel, for his kindness in reading the manuscript, and for some very valuable suggestions.

OXFORD,
January 1927

W. B. SELBIE

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CONGREGATIONALISM

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

THE aim of this book is to expound and justify that interpretation of the Christian faith, and the system of Church order and government based upon it, which is known as Congregationalism. Our task must be largely historical, and often the history of a movement is its best defence and explication. But we shall also have to deal with certain positive principles of Christian life, faith and thought. Of these principles Congregationalists once regarded themselves as the sole trustees. They fought and died to defend and propagate them ; and their work was so far justified that to a large extent these principles have now become the common property of all the Christian Churches. The question is, therefore, often asked : Has Congregationalism now any reason for existence ? Has it not made its protest and done its work, and may it not, therefore, gracefully retire from the scene ? An affirmative answer would seem to be suggested by the fact that in the course of its history Congregationalism itself has been profoundly modified. It no longer stands where it did, nor are its emphases what they were in its earlier days. It has learnt much and copied

wisely from the connexional Churches, and has ceased to write on its banners Independency as its most characteristic motto. But this again is only evidence of that freedom and elasticity which it has always claimed but not always practised. It will, therefore, be our task not merely to show what the distinctive witness of Congregationalism has been and is, but also to make good the claim that, in spite of all the changes which have taken place, that witness is still needed in the Church of Christ.

Before we enter on our historical enquiry it may be well to state, in the briefest possible terms, just what we consider the distinctive note of Congregationalism to be. This is often described as the application of democratic principles in Church government. This, however, is really secondary, and although Congregationalism certainly involves it, it is essentially something far greater and deeper. Historically it started from the determination of certain Christian men to form Churches in which all the members should be Christians. As they read their New Testament, they discovered the Church to be separate from any worldly association in the sense that it was founded by Christ and constituted by the relationship of its members to Him. They believed that where Christ is, there is His Church, and that where two or three are gathered in His name, there is He. So to them the Church was not founded on any organization, orders or tradition, but simply on the living presence of Christ with His people. And that presence was surely granted only to those who met in His name, i.e. were seeking His ends, following His lead, and dominated by His spirit. To these men the Church was the home of the Holy Spirit, and all its

members, as Christians, were kings and priests unto God. To govern the Church under the guidance of this spirit was, therefore, at once their privilege and their responsibility. To them the sole ruler of the Church was Jesus Christ Himself, and of His crown rights they were exceedingly jealous. In forming these separate Churches they were conscious of no presumption or schismatic action. They were but carrying to its logical conclusions their guiding principle *Ubi Christus ibi ecclesia*, and they found in this principle the unifying force which made all these Churches one in Christ Jesus. At the same time they believed profoundly in the power of the spirit of God to lead them into new ways of thought and action, and to take of the things of Christ and reveal them unto men. In other words, their whole conception of the Church was profoundly spiritual, and its organization was but the outcome and expression of its life. The story we have to tell will deal with the inception of these principles, and will illustrate their application to life under very varied historical conditions.

The Christian Church in the New Testament is a *koinonia*, or fellowship of believers, a divine commonwealth, an *ecclesia* of God. It is the body of Christ in the sense that its members are united with each other in virtue of their living union with Him, its one and only Head. It is a voluntary society of those who are called, redeemed and sanctified by Jesus Christ, and who are banded together to reproduce His life and serve His ends in the world. The term *ecclesia*, as used in the New Testament, has had a long and great history, but still carries with it ideas associated with the free self-governed commonwealths of Greece. To its life and

functioning the people constituting the *ecclesia* are all-important and central, and this idea certainly obtained in the earliest conception of the Christian Church. The Churches of the New Testament were strictly self-governing, and the election of officers was in the hands of the members themselves. Among these officers, bishops, presbyters and deacons appear at a comparatively early stage. The function of deacons is to serve tables and care for the poor. Bishops and presbyters are at first practically identical and have entrusted to them the work of oversight. In process of time the bishop stood out as *primus inter pares* and the sphere of his jurisdiction was widened. But originally he was a congregational rather than a diocesan functionary. The qualification for office in the early Church was the possession of divine gifts, or *charismata*, in some striking degree, and the recognition of such gifts by the common consciousness of the Church. There has been much discussion as to the length of time during which this primitive Congregational organization was maintained. While it no doubt began to give way early in the second century (cf. the Letters of Ignatius), it certainly persisted much longer, and was not finally abandoned till the fourth century. The fact is that the episcopal system proved more workable and more suited than any other to the difficult conditions of these early days of strife and consolidation. Then, as now, Congregationalism represented an ideal system of Church government, and one that required a very high standard of Christian life and conduct in order to work it. It has always the defects of its qualities, and we may freely admit that under certain conditions episcopacy does show itself to be of the *bene esse* of the Church, if not of its

esse. The lesson we learn from early Church history is that no one form of organization was then stereotyped or regarded as essential to the Church's life or being. We may therefore agree with Dr. Sanday when he says : " Our Confessional differences are indeed reflected in primitive Christianity, but not as mutually exclusive. They represent, not conflicting and irreconcilable conceptions of the original constitution of the Church, but only successive stages in the growth of that constitution. The Church passed through a congregational stage, and (if we exclude the activity of the Apostles as something exceptional) it also passed through a presbyterian stage. If anyone wishes to single out these stages and to model the society to which he belongs upon them, he is zealous for a pure and primitive polity ; he clings to the Bible and what he finds in the Bible ; he will not allow himself to wander far from that ideal which he thinks that Christ and His Apostles have left him." ¹ This, as we shall see later, exactly represents the spirit which animated the early founders of Congregationalism in this country. Under the influence of the new knowledge of the Bible, and in sharp recoil from the corruptions of the Church in their day, they returned to what they conceived to be the pure and primitive form of Church government. They read their New Testament aright, and in the simplicity of the Congregational order they found something which appealed to their piety and enthusiasm. If they went too far in erecting it into an article *stantis aut cadentis ecclesiæ* they only followed an example set them by many others. But they raised the standard of liberty at a critical time and made a much-needed protest in favour of purity of Church

¹ *Expositor*, III, viii, p. 335.

membership. History has vindicated them, and the condition of the Church to-day gives ample evidence that, though their witness has not been in vain, it is still needed.

That it was also often needed in the Church of the first few centuries of our era is evidenced by certain well-known movements of revolt, each of which may be described as a kind of outbreak of Congregationalism. The first of these took place under Montanus of Phrygia, in the last quarter of the second century. On the surface a misguided and extravagant attempt to revive the spirit of prophecy within the Church, it took the form of a passionate protest against the growing power of Bishops and Priests, and an affirmation of belief in the working of the Holy Spirit among the individual members of the Church, and so a reassertion of the priesthood of all believers. It had within it, however, no element of permanence, for it interpreted this priesthood as an obligation of asceticism upon all, and its view of prophetic inspiration was pagan and mechanical. It illustrates the dangers of an undisciplined enthusiasm, but it is interesting as a belated attempt to restore the authority of the Church as over against that of a hierarchy. It is but one indication among many that any such attempt necessarily implies a congregational theory of Church order and government.¹

At a later period both the Novatian and Donatist controversies serve to illustrate the long-continued opposition between those who emphasized the ethical and spiritual, as over against the purely ecclesiastical view of the Church and Ministry. Congregationalists

¹ For a full account of Montanism, see Gwatkin: *Early Church History*, vol. ii, p. 73.

have been called the modern Donatists, and if it is heresy to stand for purity of Church membership and for Christian character as a supreme qualification for the ministry, then they are heretics indeed. The gradual substitution of formal and mechanical tests of Church membership, such as confirmation and the reception of sacraments, for those of a more ethical and spiritual kind, created an atmosphere in which Congregationalism could not breathe. The widening of the gulf between clergy and laity, and the reduction of the laity in the Church to silence and impotence, made anything like Congregational self-government impossible. The ruthless suppression of all attempts to reassert the more primitive order concentrated power in the hands of the hierarchy until the autocratic system of medieval Catholicism was fully and firmly established.

This again, however, did not come about without occasional protests. Many of the so-called heresies of the Middle Ages were simply attempts to get back to the primitive conception of the Church and of Christianity. Albigenses and Waldensians, Beghards and Free Brethren, like Wyclif and the Lollards later on, all sought to rebuild the Church on the foundation of a literal interpretation of the New Testament, and to exclude from its usage all customs, ceremonies and institutions that were not found in the Christian Scriptures. These men set up their own little communities, sent out preachers, and suffered lay folk to administer the sacraments. Many of them sold their goods and sought to have all things in common, and in other ways tried to give literal obedience to the precepts of the Bible. To most of their contemporaries they seemed fanatical and misguided, a company of "wander-

ing hypocritical fellows", who led simple people astray and had better be suppressed with an iron hand. Suppressed they were, but their spirit, though driven underground, was not wholly killed. Again, there was no element of permanence in their work, but they stood for a principle of freedom and spiritual religion which all the might of the Roman Church proved powerless to quench, and which tended to reassert itself whenever occasion offered.

In John Wyclif and the Lollards this spirit reached a kind of high-water mark. The three chief points in Wyclif's teaching were his doctrine of "dominion by grace", his insistence on the Bible as the sole rule of faith and order, and his consequent view of the nature of the Church. With great learning and indefatigable zeal he taught the responsibility of the individual for keeping the law of God, and the supremacy of the Scriptures for Christian thought and life. His translation of the Vulgate was intended to bring this home to the common people, and he based on the word of Scripture his challenge to the Roman theory of the sacraments and of sacramental grace. His ideas were cast in a cruder form by his followers and spread far and wide. The bitterness with which the Lollards were persecuted shows that the authorities were fully alive to the subversive character of this teaching. Though it was suppressed effectively enough, it could not be altogether destroyed. Driven underground, it remained alive till the time was ripe for its reassertion. All these sporadic and abortive movements, however, point in one direction. They show clearly that any revolt against the existing Church order would have to begin with a rediscovery of the primitive scriptural system.

The result of this, in every case, was the rehabilitation of those ideas and methods which afterwards found their full fruition in the formation of Churches of the Congregational order.

This movement received a great impetus from that Revival of Learning which was one of the causes of the Protestant Reformation, and not the least important among them. The first effect of the work of the Humanists, of men like Erasmus, More and Colet, was to lead men back to the roots of Christianity in the New Testament. They sought to substitute a first-hand knowledge of Jesus Christ and His teaching for the metaphysical sophistications of Church theology, and so to open the secrets of the Christian faith to all men, rather than confine them to the learned few. Thus, Erasmus writes in the Introduction of his version of the New Testament: "The philosophy of Christ is to be learned from its few books with far less labour than the Aristotelian philosophy is to be extracted from its multitude of ponderous and conflicting commentaries. Nor is anxious preparatory learning needful to the Christian. Its viaticum is simple and at hand to all. Only bring a pious and open heart imbued above all things with a pure and simple faith. Only be teachable, and you have already made much way in this philosophy. It supplies a spirit for a teacher, imparted to none more readily than to the simple-minded. Other philosophies, by the very difficulty of their precepts, are removed out of the range of most minds. No age, no sex, no condition of life is excluded from this. The sun itself is not more common and open to all than the teaching of Christ. For I utterly dissent from the teaching of those who are unwilling that the Sacred Scriptures

should be read by the unlearned, translated into their vulgar tongue, as though Christ had taught such subtleties that they can scarcely be understood even by a few theologians, or as though the strength of the Christian religion consisted in man's ignorance of it. The mysteries of kings it may be safer to conceal, but Christ wished His mysteries to be published as openly as possible. I wish that even the weakest woman should read the Gospel—should read the Epistles of Paul. And I wish these were translated into all languages so that they might be read and understood, not only by Scots and Irishmen, but also by Turks and Saracens. To make them understood is surely the first step. It may be that they might be ridiculed by many, but some would take them to heart. I long that the husbandman should sing portions of them to himself as he follows the plough, that the weaver should hum them to the tune of his shuttle, that the traveller should beguile with their stories the tedium of his journey." This wish of Erasmus came in a measure to be fulfilled, and its fulfilment wrought a great religious change. As men read their New Testament for themselves, and found in it the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, they found themselves breathing a new and larger air and could no longer tolerate the bondage of a scholastic theology and a traditional Church. The work of the humanists underlay that of the reformers. They laid foundations on which others were to build. Luther found his emancipation in the first-hand study of the Scriptures, whereby he was enabled to come into personal relations with Jesus Christ and with God revealed in Him. As he studied and entered into the experience of St. Paul his whole view of religion changed. Like Paul,

he had done all that a man might in order to find peace with God and to put himself right in His sight. Like Paul, too, he had miserably failed, and no light came to him until, as did the Apostle, he discovered that salvation was not to be won by any act or merit of man, but was a free gift of God to faith. On the basis of this experience he asserted his belief in the liberty of the Christian man, and rebuilt Christianity on a foundation of personal faith and salvation through grace, rather than on the creeds and ceremonies of an authoritative Church. Luther had no great love for Erasmus, nor had the English reformers any great love for Luther, but they all drank at the same spring and acknowledged the same sources of inspiration. The rediscovery of Jesus Christ prepared the way for a more living and personal religion. Men entered into communion with God by this new and living way, and found themselves in the process. Here history has often repeated itself. A modern writer has said: "The figure of Jesus stands out all the more grandly as the mists of theological speculation are blown away from Him, and we come to discern Him as he really sojourned on earth. It is not too much to say that by recovering for us the historical life of Jesus, criticism has brought Christianity back to the true source of its power. The creeds, whatever may have been their value formerly, have broken down, but Jesus, as we know Him in His life, and all the more as His life is freed from accretions of legend, still commands the world's reverence and devotion. The theology of the future, it is not rash to prophesy, will start from the interpretation of Jesus as a man in history."¹ The view expressed here is no

¹ E. F. Scott, *The New Testament To-day*, p. 89.

doubt an advance on that of the Humanists, and the theological implications of it which are clearly recognized to-day would certainly have been resented by the Reformers. Nevertheless the underlying idea of religion which it expressed is integral to the Protestant faith as over against that of Catholicism. As we shall see later, this idea was carried to its logical conclusion by the early Congregationalists, who based their views of Church order and of the Christian life on the New Testament alone. To them the relation of the individual to Jesus Christ came first. Churches were companies of men and women who were thus redeemed and sanctified. Given this experience of salvation, there was no need for Church doctrine or ceremony to authorize it. The life came first and the organization followed, not *vice versa*. Hence the stress laid on the liberty of the individual, and on his right and capacity to take his share in Church government. The principles involved were by no means always maintained in their original purity, though they were never quite abandoned. The story of Congregationalism supplies abundant evidence of the fact that Churches depend for their vitality and fruitfulness on a vivid spiritual apprehension and practical application of these fundamental Christian truths. The Protestant insistence on the freedom of God's grace, on justification by faith, and on the sole mediation of Jesus Christ, makes of all Christians kings and priests unto God, and is the condition of that type of vital Christianity for which Congregationalism has always sought to stand. As Dr. Fairbairn wrote many years ago :¹ " In the independent idea of the Church, there were four determinative

¹ *Congregational Union Jubilee Lectures*, pp. 51 and 52.

elements. A Church is: (1) a society of the godly, or of men who truly believe and piously live. (2) It is a society instituted expressly to realize in the personal and collective life the religious ideals of Christ. (3) It is capable of extension only by means that produce faith, of development only by agencies that create godliness. (4) It is autonomous and authoritative, possessed of the freedom necessary to the fulfilment of its mission and the realization of its ideals, endowed with all the legislative and administrative powers needed for the maintenance of order and the attainment of progress."

CHAPTER II

ROBERT BROWNE AND THE BROWNISTS

THE most far-reaching result of the Reformation among the English people was the rise of the Puritan party in the Anglican Church. This again was due in large measure to the religious revolution wrought by the new knowledge of the Bible. So far as ecclesiastical order and ritual were concerned, the Reformation in this country changed very little. The substitution of the Crown for the Pope as head of the Church had certain important social and political effects, but did little or nothing to reform religious thought or practice. Such changes as took place were due partly to the recoil against Romish usage, and partly to the movement in favour of New Testament simplicity. But there were many in the land who felt that these changes did not go far enough, and who stood for a purer form of Church government and of worship than the authorities were disposed to allow. These "Puritans," as they were nicknamed, were genuinely in favour of reformation, but sought to carry it out from within the borders of the Church itself. Though the term "Puritan" came to be used in a popular sense of all those who sought a more sober manner of life and worship than was common in Elizabethan England, it ought strictly to be confined to those who sought to remodel the Church of England on a Reformation

pattern. According to Fuller,¹ "the odious name of Puritan" was first used in 1564 of those who resisted the attempt of the Bishops to enforce uniformity in ritual. The Puritans objected chiefly to the Ornaments Rubrics in the Elizabethan Prayer Book, and the determination of the Queen to enforce uniformity in these external matters drove them into vigorous protest.² Under the leadership of Cartwright, they opposed everything in the new Prayer Book that savoured of the "childishe and superstitious toyes" of Popery, especially the eucharistic vestments, the sign of the cross in baptism, the use of the ring in marriage, bowing at the name of Jesus, and so on. In theology they were Calvinistic, and they stood for immediate communion between the soul of man and God. They found their model for the Church in the New Testament and sought to free it from the rule of the State. In spite of persecution and controversy the spirit of Puritanism lived on, and has been among the most potent influences in the religious thought and life of the English people from the "spacious days" of Elizabeth until the present time. Its direct outcome was Presbyterianism. Congregationalism, while owing much to its spirit, was at once a revolt from it, and an advance upon it.

The watchword of Elizabethan Congregationalism was: "Reformation without tarrying for any."³

¹ *Church History of Britain*, ix, p. 66.

² Bishop Hooper, in Edward's reign, was the first to raise the question of vestments, and Thomas Cartwright, while following him in this respect, laid more stress on the question of Church government.

³ The latest evidence as to Congregational origins is discussed in two pamphlets by Dr. Albert Peel, viz. *The First Congregational Churches* and *The Brownists in Norwich and Norfolk about 1580* (Cambridge University Press).

There were not a few earnest souls who felt that something more radical was needed than a mere reformation of the Church of England. To purge the Church of Romish ceremonies was well enough, but that alone would not suffice to restore the New Testament purity and simplicity. Before this could be brought about, a root and branch transformation of the Church would be required, and they knew well that under existing conditions this was impossible. Opinions of this kind, which had long been smouldering, were fanned into a flame by the writings of Robert Browne, and it is at least a tribute to his influence that the early Independents should so long have been known as Brownists. This remarkable man is still something of an enigma, though the main facts of his career are now well known, thanks to the researches of Mr. Champlin Burrage, the Rev. Ives Cater,¹ and the Rev. T. G. Crippen. According to the story which they tell, Browne was born at Tolethorpe, in Rutlandshire, about 1550. Of his early education nothing is known, but he graduated at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, in 1572, and while at the University he had the reputation of being "known and counted forward in religion". After leaving Cambridge he appears to have taught pupils in various places, one of which was probably London. He had some success as a teacher, but was compelled to abandon the work after a time because of his religious opinions. At this early period of his life he tells us that "he fell into great care, and was sore grieved while he long considered many things amiss, and the cause of all to

¹ Cf. "The True Story of Robert Browne", by the Rev. F. Ives Cater, *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, January 1906.

be the woeful and lamentable state of the Church. Wherefore he laboured much to know his duty in such things ". He made known his views on these " many things amiss " both to his pupils and to a wider public, whereby he gained suspicion for himself without advancing the reformation of the Church. Returning to Cambridge about 1578-9 he joined forces with Richard Greenham, of Dry Drayton, a clergyman of Presbyterian views who allowed him to teach in his parish. After a time " certain in Cambridge ", with the approval of the Mayor and Vice-Chancellor, asked Browne to preach among them. This raised the question of a Bishop's licence or ordination, and after much consideration he decided that he could not apply for either. In spite of this decision his brother applied to Archbishop Grindal on his behalf, and in 1579 Browne was granted Letters Dismissory and a licence to preach. These, however, he declined to use, and in Cambridge " openly preached against the calling and authorizing of preachers by bishops ". This naturally led to trouble, and after a time a promise was extracted from Browne that he would no longer preach in Cambridge. Some time in 1580, therefore, he removed to Norwich where he boarded in the house of his friend, Robert Harrison, the " Master of the Hospital ". In Norwich he came into touch with Dutch immigrants, some of whom at least were Anabaptists. Probably under their influence he became confirmed in his opinion that there could be no middle way of reformation, such as the partial conformity of many Puritan ministers sought. In any case Browne now set himself to propagate the views which saw the light in *A Treatise of Reformation without tarrying for any*. He gathered a company of

like-minded men and women and bound them under covenant to refuse "all ungodly communion with wicked persons". He preached in various places in Norfolk and Suffolk, denouncing the existing form of Church government, and urging the right of the Church to reform itself. He was imprisoned by the Bishop of Norwich, but was soon released at the instance of his distant kinsman, the Lord Treasurer Burghley. Neither imprisonment nor the admonitions of Burghley produced any effect. Browne continued preaching and teaching, and after he and several of his friends had been imprisoned again, the whole company "were agreed and fully persuaded that the Lord did call them out of England". Early in 1582 Browne and his followers joined Cartwright in Middleburg. The association did not last long. Browne was ill and hard to please. He found Presbyterianism as little to his liking as Episcopacy. In *A book which sheweth the life and manners of all true Christians, and Reformation without tarrying for any*, he burnt his boats. These two tracts together with the *Treatise upon i. 23 of Matthewe*, set out quite clearly the fundamental principles of Congregationalism. Browne urged with a good deal of bitter and characteristically coarse invective that the civil rulers should have no rule or authority over the Church. They have no right to "compel religion", or to "force a submission to ecclesiastical government by laws and penalties". Church and State are entirely separate realms and must be kept apart. Browne, therefore, naturally broke with all those Puritans who, though they greatly desired reformation, were content to wait for it at the hands of the civil authorities. These, he contended, even if they had the will to reform

religion, had neither the right nor the power. In regard to the constitution of the Church, Browne laid down the famous Separatist rule that "the Kingdom of God was not to be begun by whole parishes, but rather of the Worthiest were they never so few". Instead of a Church consisting of all baptized persons who were not excommunicate, he would set up "gathered Churches" of men and women bound together by a willing covenant. Such a body meeting in the Name of Jesus, i.e. for His ends and under the guidance of His spirit, would constitute a Church after the order of the New Testament. Of such a Church Christ is the head, and of its members every one "is made a King, a Priest and a Prophet, under Christ, to uphold and further the Kingdom of God". "The officers of the Church are to be chosen by the Church and have their several charge in one Church only." They are to be ordained at the hands of "elders", i.e. the "forwardest" or most worthy of the Church members. These were to be leaders and examples in the Church, deriving their authority from the inward call of God of which the imposition of hands was but the recognition and ratification. These several and independent Churches were not to be isolated, but should maintain friendly relations with each other, and might even set up councils in "the meetings of sundry Churches which are, when the weaker Churches seek help of the stronger, for deciding, or redressing of matters, or else the stronger look to them for redress".✕

Here, then, we have all the essentials of later Congregationalism. Both in his attitude to the State and in his attempted reconstruction of Church order Browne laid down the lines for future development, but his

position was more radical and democratic than that of Barrow and certain other of the later Independents. This suggests the question as to the origin of his views about which there has been much controversy. Did he derive his position directly from his own study, or was he influenced by the teaching of the Anabaptists either in Holland or at home? In all probability both factors must be reckoned with. Browne was probably acquainted with the Anabaptist position long before he went to Holland. He had no very comfortable time there, and would not have been likely to learn from them unless he had previously been inclined in their direction. But his entire refusal to accept the practice of believers' baptism shows that he could be quite independent of them, and there is no doubt that he worked out for himself the scriptural basis of his system. However much his views may have tallied with others current in his time, he was certainly no mere copyist. In laying down the broad lines of a new Church polity he became the father of modern Congregationalism.

After the break up at Middleburg, due partly to his own difficult temper, and partly to the Separatist insistence on strict Church discipline, Browne returned with several of his followers to this country. Meanwhile his tracts were being widely circulated in spite of the fact that they were prohibited by the authorities as "seditious, schismatical and erroneous printed books and libels tending to the depraving of the Ecclesiastical government within these realms". So bitter was the resentment they aroused that, in the summer of 1583, John Coppin and Elias Thacker were hanged at Bury St. Edmunds for the crime of distributing them. Later on in the same year, probably because he feared

a like fate, Browne went to Scotland and sought to propagate his views there. Though he stayed North for about a year and was left free to wander about and preach as he pleased, he met with little or no success. Indeed, his doctrine was quite as obnoxious to the Presbyterian authorities, as it was to the Bishops in England.¹ Shortly after his return to this country he again went to Holland, probably in order to escape imprisonment. For the statement often made that he was kept in prison for a long time at this period, there is no evidence whatever. From Holland he returned to Stamford, bringing with him a manuscript entitled *An answer to Mr. Cartwright's letter for joining with the English Churches*. This was shortly afterwards printed and circulated, it would appear, without Browne's knowledge. It is a most interesting document, and shows Browne still very bitter against those who would make their peace with the Church as it then was. He holds Cartwright up to scorn as follows: "First he saith they are unlawful ministers, and yet ministers of God: then that they are ministers of God, but not lawful ministers of God: thirdly, that they have their calling and allowance by the Church, and yet are thrust upon the Church: fourthly, that either such dumb ministers and their ministry is of God, or if they be of the devil, yet if the bishop and his officers do authorize them, then the Church doth authorize them, and no man ought to refuse them: fifthly, that their reading of service is to be heard, as being a good thing from Christ: sixthly, that their sacraments are to be received

¹ Browne himself said that he suffered much more at the hands of the preachers, i.e. Presbyterian ministers, than he did from the Bishops.

as good things from Christ : whereby also it followeth that Christ doth send such dumb or blind reading ministers to take charge of the people : also that, for a need, reading ministers may be in the Church instead of preaching ministers. Further, that the bishops may thrust upon the flock what ministers they list, and give them that authority and calling which God cannot give them : also that the people shall be accounted God's people and Church though they be under the devil's messenger and subject to his guiding. How ungodly and foolish doctrine is all this ! ”¹

The publication of this document in the spring of 1585 was followed by another imprisonment of its author, and the imprisonment by his recantation. The real reasons for this step will probably never be fully known. Browne had had much discussion with his friends as to the lawfulness of attending services in the Church of England, and had said openly that he could not regard it as unlawful. He was also subject to much pressure from Lord Burghley and certain ecclesiastical authorities ; and he may have begun to doubt the possibility of the reforms he desired. He was, too, a man of quite unstable temper. Even his own supporters found him difficult, and he was much at the mercy of his moods. At any rate he now practically abandoned the cause for which he had fought and suffered. He made his submission to the Church of England, acknowledging it to be “ the Church of Christ, or the Church of God ”, and promising to attend its services and observe its sacraments. He also undertook to behave himself

¹ *True Story of Robert Browne*, p. 33. From a MS. discovered by Mr. Burrage in 1905. In this and other quotations from Browne I have modernized the spelling.

and keep the peace, but it is interesting to note that the terms of his subscription contain no word about retracting his Congregational opinions.

The rest of Browne's story need not detain us long. The period of his conformity falls into two parts. From 1585 to 1591 he was a lay member of the Church of England, and half-hearted at that. For the remaining forty-two years of his life, 1591 to 1633, he was an ordained clergyman, but, as we shall see, one who held very loosely by his ordination vows. During the first period he was frequently in trouble with the Anglican authorities, and carried on a running controversy with the Separatists. He returned to his earlier profession of teaching, and about 1586 became schoolmaster in St. Olave's School, Southwark. In order to obtain this position he again entered into a solemn agreement to conform to the doctrine and observe the sacraments of the Church, to avoid disturbance and the keeping of conventicles, and to bring his children with him to sermons and lectures. Yet we learn that up to 1588 he had failed to communicate in his parish, and that he continued to preach in private houses.¹ At the same time he was engaged in controversy with Barrow and Greenwood, against whom he defended the clergy of the Church of England in a remarkable pamphlet entitled *A reproof of certain schismatical persons and their doctrine, touching the hearing and preaching of the word of God*. In it he contends that there are good preachers in the Church of England, duly called of God, and anxious to reform abuses. They ought, therefore, to be listened to, and "it is ungrateful of you to carry on any longer a rigidly Separatist reformation against

¹ *True Story of Robert Browne*, p. 48.

them". The whole document shows a much milder and more truly Christian temper than is evident in any other of Browne's writings. It reflects his mind at this period and shows him, while not recanting altogether, to be tired of useless controversy and ready to see the best, rather than the worst, in his erstwhile opponents. Controversy, however, he could not altogether escape. One result of his argument with Barrow and others was that he came to dislike Presbyterianism even more than Anglicanism, and in this frame of mind he sought ordination in the Church of England. In the summer of 1589 he applied to the Bishop of Peterborough, carrying with him a letter from Lord Burghley asking the Bishop, if he found him dutiful and conformable, to help him to some ecclesiastical preferment. After some delay, due, no doubt, to the fact that Browne was recognized to be no very consistent conformist, he was ordained and presented to the living of Little Casterton, which was in the gift of his eldest brother, who then occupied Tolethorpe Hall. This cure he only held for a short time. In 1591 he became rector of the parish of Achurch-cum-Thorpe Waterville, in the county of Northampton, where he remained until his death in 1633.

None of Browne's biographers has succeeded in lifting the veil of mystery which hangs over these last forty-two years of his life. His conformity appears still to have been of very doubtful quality. He paid a curate, or curates, to preach for him, and there is good evidence to the effect that he fostered and taught in a conventicle in his own parish, and thus seemed to encourage Separatism in spite of his outward conformity. This led to his being cited before the Bishop of Peterborough in 1616. Apparently he neglected or declined

to appear, and was therefore, in due course, excommunicated. He then left Achurch for a time, but soon returned to the neighbourhood and built a house at Thorpe Waterville, with a small chapel attached, where he continued teaching and preaching. Two years later he again made submission to the Bishop, and was readmitted to the Church and to his cure at Achurch, in charge of which he remained till his death. It is quite true that in all this Browne does not cut a very dignified or even decent figure. But there is nothing in the story of his later years to justify the obloquy which his enemies have heaped upon his name. We may dismiss at once the stories of his scandalous treatment of his wife and of his lapses into more or less complete insanity. That his spirit had been broken by imprisonment and suffering we may well believe. This, no doubt, warped his judgment and soured his disposition, and in a man of his fiery temper may even have produced worse effects. In any case it is difficult to reconcile his continuance in office in the Church with his evident retention of Congregational principles. He presents a psychological and moral problem which we have no means of solving. His end was pitiful. He had been committed to prison for not paying his rates and assaulting the rate-collector. An old and sick man, stout and unwieldy, he was carried to Northampton jail on a farm cart covered with a feather bed. A few months later he died in the prison, a lonely and tragic figure, dishonoured and unwept, and in such bad odour that his very followers were eager to disown his name. But this is by no means the whole story. Browne had done his work and had done it well. However great his lapses and defects, and they were serious enough,

nothing can deprive him of the honour of having formulated for the first time those great principles of religious freedom, and purity of Church policy, which were not only the foundation of Congregationalism, but finally established the work of the Reformation in this country. By the work which he did all the Churches have benefited, for all alike have come to recognize the value of spiritual autonomy, and have accepted the principle that membership should be not indiscriminately granted but confined to the worthiest. To use Browne's own words: "Every one of the Church is made a King, and Priest, and a Prophet, under Christ, to uphold and further the Kingdom of God, and to break and destroy the Kingdom of Antichrist and Satan. The Kingdom of all Christians is their office of guiding and ruling with Christ to subdue the wicked, and make one another obedient to Christ. Their Priesthood is their office of cleansing and redressing wickedness, whereby sin and uncleanness is taken away from among them. Their Prophecy is their office of judging all things by the Word of God, whereby they increase in knowledge and wisdom among themselves." ¹ In sentences like these Browne shows that he is very near that ideal conception of the Church for which Congregationalism stands at its best. Every member of the Church is in living union with his Lord, and thus the whole Church becomes the organ of the mind and will of Christ. It is a high ideal, some say an impossible one, but when it was first conceived it did a work which nothing short of it could have accomplished.

It should always be remembered, however, that Congregationalism existed in practice long before

¹ *A Book which Sheweth.*

Browne set forth its principles. Even before Elizabeth came to the throne, groups of Christians had met for private worship, and had discovered the joy and reality of communion with God, without ordained ministers or a set service. When reformation tarried, the example of these gatherings was followed. The life preceded the organization, and Browne wrote with experience of such gathered Churches behind him.¹

¹ Cf. Dale's *History of English Congregationalism*, p. 62.

CHAPTER III

THE CONGREGATIONAL MARTYRS

ENGLISHMEN naturally look back to the reign of Elizabeth as to a time of great intellectual awakening. It was an adventurous age with pioneers like Drake and Frobisher in one realm, Shakespeare, Spenser and Bacon in another. It was also an age of spiritual adventure, and one fraught with peril. What is known as the Elizabethan settlement represented the ideas of the Queen and her advisers as to the amount of reform needed by the Church in these realms. It practically identified the Church with the State and regulated its affairs with an almost military strictness. The Queen was commander-in-chief, and the Bishops and clergy were her subordinate officers to whose orders and discipline all the people of the country, being *ipso facto* members of the Church, must perforce submit. The ideal was uniformity, and a uniformity to be enforced under extreme pains and penalties. But there were many people in the land who did not so read reformation. It was not for this that they had thrown off the yoke of Rome. They had tasted of the wine of freedom and they resented having the cup so soon dashed from their lips.¹ As we have already seen,

¹ A most important collection of materials for the history of Puritanism in Elizabeth's reign is *The Seconde Parte of a Register*, edited by Dr. Albert Peel. It contains a vast amount of information in regard to leading personalities in the struggle and a

Puritanism within the Church had its logical issue in Separatism, and it was on the Separatists that the real burden of the conflict fell. To the secular historian their protest and sufferings seem but a mere eddy in the wide stream of the national life. They were dangerous fanatics who refused to fall in line with the national system and who suffered accordingly. But there was more in it than that. The poor martyrs of Separatism represent the high-water mark of a tide whose ebb and flow has to be felt for many a day. As a modern writer has said: "On a world heaving with expanding energies, and on a Church uncertain of itself, rose after two generations of premonitory mutterings the tremendous storm of the Puritan movement. The forest bent; the oaks snapped; the dry leaves were driven before the gale, neither all of winter nor all of spring, but violent and life-giving, pitiless and tender, sounding strange notes of yearning and contrition, as of voices wrung from a people dwelling in Meshec which signifies Prolonging, in Kedar which signifies Blackness: while amid the blare of trumpets and the clash of arms, and the rending of the carved work of the Temple, humble to God and haughty to man, the soldier saints swept over battle-field and scaffold, their garments rolled in blood."¹

This, however, is to anticipate. The Elizabethan Separatists were moulded by persecution and beat out their position in controversy. But those of them who came thus into the limelight were comparatively few. They represented, however, a much larger body of opinion in the country than is generally realized. This host of unknown and obscure men. It also throws some new light on the opinions and doings of Separatists in the same period.

¹ R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, p. 197.

explains why, when the leaders were killed or driven from the land, the movement they had begun was not crushed but still marched forward. The blood of the martyrs became again the seed of the Church.¹

The best illustration of the widespread sympathy felt throughout the country with the Puritan position is to be found in the vogue of the Martin Marprelate tracts. Their story is well known, though the problem of their authorship has not yet been fully solved. They were the work, not of Separatists but of Puritans, but they brought much grist to the Separatist mill. The men most responsible for them were John Field, Penry, Waldegrave, Throckmorton and Udall, though others were engaged in the work. They were printed secretly in a press that was moved about from place to place, and in spite of frantic efforts to suppress them on the part of the authorities, they spread like wildfire. They were written in the vernacular of the time, and occasionally descend to coarse invective and vulgar jests. They held up the Bishops and all their works to scorn and ridicule. They exposed real abuses, and there was enough truth in their charges to win for them both assent and applause. In the matter of taste, while they certainly greatly erred, they were at least better than most of the answers to them published on the other side.

¹ The general attitude of Separatists to the Crown may be judged from the following: "Nevertheless, this is out of doubt, that the Quenes highnes hath not authoritie to compel anie man to beleve any thing contrary to God's Word, nether may the subject geve her Grace the obedience, in case he do his soule is lost for ever without repentance. Our bodyes, goodes, and lives be at her commandement, and she shall have them as of true subjects. But the soule of man for religion is bound to none but unto God and his holy word." Quoted from a Separatist letter, 1567-71, in *The Seconde Parte of a Register*, vol i, p. 58.

They do not, however, belong to Congregational history, save in so far as they testify to the deep, if inarticulate sympathy felt throughout the land for the Puritan position. No doubt at this time such sympathy was evoked rather by the arrogance and misdoings of Prelates than by any reasoned convictions as to the true nature of the Church. Nevertheless the letters themselves give some indication that the idea of the Church current in Episcopal circles was not altogether accepted by the people at large. The polemic against the Bishops is not merely based on their moral shortcomings, but on the fact that they show themselves to be little Popes and Antichrists, and rest their authority too closely on the temporal power. Their authority is regarded as a usurpation, and their demand for canonical obedience as something subversive of true Christian freedom.¹

It was in an atmosphere such as this that the Congregational martyrs did their work and made their protest. The names of Henry Barrow, John Greenwood, and John Penry will always be remembered as those of pioneers of the Congregational faith and leaders in a great company of men and women who for that faith willingly laid down their lives. Barrow was the son of a country squire of Shipdam in Norfolk. He was "a gentleman of a good house", and kinsman to Lord Bacon. A fellow commoner of Clare Hall, Cambridge, he trained for the bar at Gray's Inn after taking his degree. In London he lived the life of a man about town, "a vain and libertine youth". According to the well-known story, he was converted by the chance

¹ For a full account of this controversy, cf. *An historical introduction to the Marprelate Tracts*, by the Rev. W. Pierce, 1908, and to the *Edition of the Tracts* by the same writer, 1911.

hearing of a sermon, and swung over at once to Puritanism, affecting "a preciseness in the highest degree". This brought him into touch with John Greenwood, another Cambridge man, who had taken orders and passed through Puritanism to Separatism. Greenwood was connected (probably as teacher) with the first London Congregational Church, of which Francis Johnson was Pastor. One Sunday in October 1586, Greenwood was reading the Scriptures at a meeting held in Henry Martin's house in the parish of St. Andrews in the Wardrobe, when the officers of the Bishop of London raided the house and carried off most of the company to prison. Greenwood was sent ultimately to the Clink, and about a month later Barrow, who was visiting him there, was illegally arrested, and in the spring of the following year he and Greenwood were formally indicted under the act of 1581 for "withdrawing from the religion now by Her Highness' authority established". They were committed to the Fleet prison where they remained till their execution at Tyburn in April 1593. It was during the course of this long imprisonment that the association of the two men produced a series of writings of the utmost importance for Congregational history. Both Barrow and Greenwood strenuously repudiated any connection with Robert Browne, and refused to be called Brownists. But for all that they were unconsciously influenced by his writings and reproduced his ideas. These prison books were written and issued under the most extraordinary difficulties. Scribbled on scraps of paper secretly provided by the prisoners' friends, they were smuggled out of the prison a few sheets at a time and taken over to Holland to be printed. The writers could

keep no copy and see no proofs, and the wonder is that they were able to produce anything coherent. Barrow in all cases was the writer, but no doubt gained much help from Greenwood who was the better educated in theology. His style is clear, trenchant and vivid. He knows what he means and says it outspokenly. When it is remembered that all his work was done in the filth and darkness of an English prison of those days, it is impossible not to admire the man's indomitable courage and skilful resource.¹

Among the writings attributed to Barrow, though he was probably not the sole author of it, is the following manifesto which Dr. Powicke thinks was the earliest Separatist defence published in 1588. It is entitled, *A Brief Summe of the causes of our separation and of our purposes in practice*, and it is worth quoting in full.

(1) We seek above all things the peace and protection of the Most High, and the Kingdom of Christ Jesus our Lord.

(2) We seek and fully purpose to worship God aright, according as He hath commanded in His most Holy Word.

(3) We seek the fellowship of His faithful and obedient servants, and together with them to enter covenant with the Lord, and by the direction of His Holy Spirit, to proceed to a godly, free and right choice of Ministers and other officers by Him ordained to the service of His Church.

(4) We seek to establish and obey the ordinances and laws of our Saviour Christ left by His last will and Testament to the governing and guiding of His Church without altering, changing, innovating, wresting or leaving out any of them that the Lord shall give us right of.

(5) We purpose (by the assistance of the Holy Ghost) in this faith and order to lead our lives, and for this faith and

¹ The best account of Barrow and his work is to be found in the monograph *Henry Barrow, Separatist*, by Dr. F. J. Powicke. London, 1900.

order to leave our lives, if such be the goodwill of our Heavenly Father, to whom be honour and glory. Amen.

(6) And now that our forsaking and utter abandoning of these disordered assemblies as they generally stand in England, may not seem strange nor offensive to any man that will judge or be judged by the Word of God, we allege and affirm them heinously guilty in these four principal Transgressions.

- (1) They worship the true God after a false manner, their worship being made of the invention of man, even of that man of sin, erroneous and imposed upon them.
- (2) For that the profane and ungodly multitudes without exception of any one person, are with them received into, and retained in the bosom of the Church.
- (3) For that they have a false Antichristian ministry imposed upon them, retained with them, and maintained by them.
- (4) For that these Churches are ruled by, and remain in, subjection unto an Antichristian and ungodly government, clean contrary to the institution of our Saviour Christ. "When these things stand thus, let him that readeth consider."

The protest and reasons thus formulated are carried farther in Barrow's chief work entitled, *A Brief Discovery of the False Church* (1590), and in a broadsheet of 1589, *A true description of the visible Congregation of the Saints under the Gospel, according to the word of Truth*. In these books is set forth a doctrine of the Church according to the New Testament in terms which differ in no essential point from those made familiar by Robert Browne. Barrow writes as a layman and with all a lawyer's directness and force, though with a grim humour all his own. He rather rejoices in his freedom

from theological learning. He has the Word of God before him, and needs no other authority or warrant. Yet he by no means disdains the ordinary weapons of controversy. Logic, rhetoric, denunciation, and every style of argument are pressed into his service. He begins by setting up uncompromisingly the ideal of the gathered Church. The true Church must consist only of the worthiest, of those who have made open profession of their faith, and are striving to live consecrated lives. These alone are in covenant relationship with one another and with their Lord. Anything less than this he cannot understand or tolerate. A mere association of rate-payers is no Church. In this connection he roundly condemns Calvin's Church system as established at Geneva and defended by many Puritan writers. The Ministers and other officers of the Church are to be those given in the New Testament and must be chosen as having the qualifications there laid down. The Church must keep the choice of them in its own hands, and they, like all the members, must be the obedient servants of the Church. The sacraments of the Church are Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and they must be administered simply according to the New Testament requirements. These are :

- (1) A lawful minister of the Gospel to deliver them.
- (2) A faithful people or their seed to receive them.
- (3) The outward elements and form of words which our Saviour Christ hath ordained thereunto.

These positions Barrow and Greenwood stoutly defended in their various examinations before Archbishop Whitgift and his advisers. The story of their trial, if such it can be called, has often been told, and

illustrates at once the malice and unfairness of their accusers and the skill and fortitude of the victims. The chief aim of the prosecution was to make these men commit themselves to some treasonable declaration against the Queen, and so to show that Separatism and high treason were identical. Barrow, who refused to take any oath, beyond saying "By God's grace I will answer nothing but the truth", insisted that Jesus Christ was the only head of His Church, and that "No Prince, neither the whole world, neither the Church itself, may make any laws for the Church other than Christ hath already left in His Word." This led the Chief Justice to observe that he had answered "very directly and compendiously", and did the accused a good turn for the moment by dividing the civil from the ecclesiastical authorities. But when asked later whether the Church itself could reform abuses without staying for the Prince, he had to reply, "Yes, may and ought, though all the Princes in the world should prohibit the same upon pain of death." He even went farther in saying that the Church could excommunicate the Queen herself if it thought right to do so. To the Erastian mind this left no doubt as to his disloyalty. In his later examinations, worn by suffering and privations, and smarting under the injustice of his long imprisonment, he often lost his temper and spoke unadvisedly. He denounced the Prayer Book as idolatry, and the Archbishop as a "miserable compound neither ecclesiastical nor civil". In his meditations in prison he chided himself for this and prayed that he might learn to "set a more careful watch upon his lips". But we may be sure that nothing of the kind would have availed him. His attitude was too uncompromising, and all

attempts to shake him or to promote disagreement between him and Greenwood failed. After their condemnation the two men were three times taken to Tyburn and reprieved at the last moment in the hope that they might recant in terror of death. But they were not of that kind, and endured steadfastly to the end. It came at last in April 1593, when, as was said, "they made a very godly end and prayed for the Queen and the State".

Two months later John Penry met the same fate with even greater readiness and resolution. Of all the early Separatists he is perhaps the most attractive. Born a Welshman, and brought up a Roman Catholic, he was driven by study of the New Testament first into Puritanism and then into Separatism and Independency. He was educated at Peterhouse, Cambridge, but migrated to Oxford after taking his bachelor's degree. At Oxford he became a member of St. Alban Hall and completed the exercises for his M.A. At both Universities he came into touch with Puritanism, and the new impulse he thus obtained was turned into a burning conviction by what he saw of the corruption of the Church in his own beloved country, Wales. His first book bore the following quaint and comprehensive title: "A treatise containing the aequity of an humble supplication which is to be exhibited unto Her Gracious Majesty and this high Court of Parliament in the behalf of the Country of Wales that some order may be taken for the preaching of the Gospel among those people. Wherein also is set down as much of the estate of our people as without offence could be made known to the end that our case (if it please God) may be pitied by them who are not of this assembly, and so they also may be driven to labour on our behalf." In the course of his plea Penry gives a deplorable picture

of the spiritual destitution of Wales. The clergy were ignorant and incompetent. Very few of them could preach and many were absentees. He therefore urged the necessity for preaching the Gospel and for teaching the Word of God in the language of the people. This was a grave offence in the eyes of Whitgift and his associates. Though Parliament received the book "with no disliking thereof", it was very speedily confiscated by Episcopal warrant and its author imprisoned. He was at once brought up before Whitgift and the High Commission, charged with being a factious slanderer of the Government and with publishing "flat treason and heresy". After the usual kind of examination he was committed to prison, where he remained for about a month, when he was allowed to go free. There was no real case against him. This treatment, as was perhaps natural, only stirred him to fresh zeal. He saw himself "bound in conscience not to give over my former purpose, in seeking the good of my countrymen by the rooting out of ignorance and blindness from among them". For the moment, however, his activities were mostly in England. We find him associated with leading Puritans in Northampton and London, and gaining repute among them as a writer and controversialist. Along with Udall, Waldegrave and Throckmorton he was concerned in the Marprelate business, and took his full share in the campaign against the Bishops. For the next six years Penry continued writing and preaching. After the last of the Martin letters had appeared and the hue and cry was hot against them, he took refuge in Scotland, where he was allowed to preach in spite of the fact that the Archbishop's warrant was out against him. Returning to London in 1592, he joined the Church under Francis Johnson

and Greenwood, and became an active member of it, though he refused office. When the Church was broken up and most of its members and leaders arrested, Penry escaped for a time. He was soon taken, however, and executed almost immediately. He had always protested his loyalty to the Queen and was certainly not guilty of the treason for which he was falsely condemned. He died a martyr to the two great causes for which he had lived, viz. liberty of worship, and the freedom of the Press. His Congregationalism was the logical issue of his Puritanism. Only by the assertion of the supreme rights of Jesus Christ as Head of the Church could a real reformation be obtained. For such a reformation he was prepared to make any sacrifice. Penry was a lively writer with a clear and pointed style, and a very definite idea of what he was after. He had been brought to the position for which he died partly by study of the New Testament idea of the Church, but partly, too, by his sharp resentment against the palpable deficiencies of the State Church.¹

At the same time it should be clearly understood that the position which he and other leading Separatists took up at this time was by no means merely negative. Their sharp antagonism to the Bishops and all they stood for was to some extent an accident. If it coloured their language and often determined the form of their protest, this was only because it cut so sharply across convictions which they had arrived at quite independently of the circumstances of their day. They found the Church, as they knew it, quite incapable of containing or expressing adequately the deep religious experience to which they had been brought by their own reading of the Word

¹ C.f. *John Penry*, by William Pierce, London, 1923.

of God. They were quite able to distinguish between religion and "the things about religion", and it was with the former that they were chiefly concerned. They were true sons of the Reformation in that they recognized the importance of the ethical core of Christianity, and of the immediacy of the relation between the soul and God. Hence their demand for a Church in which all the members should be Christian, and for a worship which should give scope to the individual quest for God and the free response of the Holy Spirit. In setting up such Churches and so seeking to worship, they were not conscious of committing any sin of schism. What else was there for them to do, seeing that they could get no help from the duly constituted authorities. They honestly believed themselves to be moved by the spirit of God, and they had the New Testament in their hands. Doctrinally they differed little, if at all, from the majority of the Christians of their day. But they sought a higher standard of Christian life, and they stood for the spiritual autonomy of the Church in order that, as John Owen said, the Church might become "such a society as hath power, ability and fitness to attain those ends for which Christ hath ordained Churches". The Separatists believed in giving to Churches that liberty which Luther had claimed for the individual Christian. They were not against authority, only the authority must be spiritual and not legal. The true Head of the Church was Christ and not the Queen or the Pope, and as His Spirit was given freely to all Christians they were all capable of ruling the Church under Him. No external authority was therefore needed. As Barrow said, "Is the Church of God still in such wardship and such infancy? Shut up as under a garrison that it must have such tutors and

rudiments ? Is not Christ now dead, risen and ascended ? And hath freed His Church from such tutelship ? He Himself now becoming their lawgiver and minister in person, and hath now given them His Holy Word and Spirit to administer wisdom unto them in all freedom to use the same, His word, according to His will and their own occasions, unto His glory and their comforts."

CHAPTER IV

THE EXILES

NOT long before his execution John Penry wrote to his brethren: "Seeing banishment, with loss of goods, is likely to betide you all, prepare yourselves for this hard entreaty." It soon became necessary to take his advice. The passing of a new Uniformity Act in 1593¹ made the position of the Separatists intolerable. It was provided that if any person or persons should absent themselves from Church for a month, or in any way persuade any of the Queen's subjects to deny her ecclesiastical supremacy, to refuse to come to Church, or to attend any unlawful religious assembly, that they should be committed to prison without bail till they conformed and made submission. Should they refuse they were to be banished, and if they failed to leave the country or returned without licence they were to be hanged as felons. Further, it was made a penal offence to give shelter to a Separatist, even of one's own kith and kin. After the passing of this Act most of the imprisoned Separatists were released, really that the country might be rid of them. The secret Church in London was broken up, and its members and others in twos and threes made their way to Holland. They were miserably poor and had hard work to maintain themselves

¹ Entitled, "An Act to retain the Queen's Majesty's subjects in their due obedience."

alive. But they founded a Congregational Church at Amsterdam, of which Francis Johnson later became pastor and Henry Ainsworth teacher. Ainsworth was a remarkable man, probably one of the best Hebrew scholars of his day, and a singularly fine and winning character. Governor Bradford says of him: "A very learned man he was, and a close student which much impaired his health. He was a man very modest, amiable and sociable in his ordinary course and carriage, of an innocent and unblameable life and conversation, of a meek spirit and a calm temper, void of passion and not easily provoked." Notwithstanding that it had a man of this kind among its leaders, the story of the Amsterdam Church is one of most unedifying dissensions. There was trouble between the Pastor, Francis Johnson, and his brother George. George was the leader of the more strict section of the Church, and they objected to the dress and manners of the Pastor's wife. Francis had married the young widow of a London merchant, and her busks and whalebones, ruffs and rings were regarded as a scandal. In the end, however, George was expelled from the Church. Trouble arose, too, over one White, who was obviously insubordinate and very free in accusing certain of his fellow-members of grievous sins and offences. There was trouble also over John Smyth, who adopted Baptist views and ultimately led a secession from the Church. The whole story is a melancholy one, and illustrates the truth that the strength of a Congregational Church is like the strength of a chain, in its weakest link. When one member fails, the whole Church suffers, and the high ideal which the Church sets up requires ideal men and women to carry it out. After all, it is not surprising that in a Church of some

three hundred members there should have been some black sheep, and the circumstances were such that they were able to do mischief out of all proportion to their numbers or their importance.¹

Ten years after the passing of the Act which drove most of the Separatists abroad, Elizabeth died and James I came to the throne of England. His accession seemed a good opportunity for the exiles to seek return. Their petitions to this effect, however, met with no response. James was no friend either of Puritanism or Separatism, and thought that the best treatment of sectaries was to "harry them out of the land". It was not long, therefore, before another and far more important exodus took place, this time from Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire, where Puritanism had long had a firm footing. Towards the end of Elizabeth's reign an Independent Church had been formed at Gainsborough, which later divided, one part remaining in the Lincolnshire town and the other settling down at the Manor House of Scrooby. Of the Gainsborough Church John Smyth was leader, and after a time it numbered among its members a deposed clergyman and formerly Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, John Robinson. Scrooby Manor was occupied by William Brewster, formerly secretary to one of Elizabeth's Ministers, Davison, and now postmaster of the district. He became elder of the Church which met in his house. Bradford says of him that he was held "in good esteem among his friends and the good gentlemen of those parts, especially the godly and religious. He did much good in the county where

¹ The full story of the Amsterdam Church will be found in Dr. Powicke's book, *Henry Barrow and the exiled Church of Amsterdam*.

he lived, in promoting and furthering religion ; and not only by his practice and example and provoking and encouraging of others, but by procuring of good preachers to all places thereabouts, and drawing on of others to assist and help forward in such a work ; he himself most commonly deepest in the charge and sometimes above his ability". Of the Scrooby Church, Richard Clyfton, a former Anglican rector, was pastor, and to this Church, too, John Robinson was transferred from Gainsborough. These companies of earnest and determined Separatists could not long escape the attentions of the authorities. Bradford, who knew them well, and lived then at Austerfield, about three miles from Scrooby, says of them : " Some were taken and clapt up in prison ; others had their houses beset and watched night and day, and hardly escaped their hands, and the most were fain to fly and leave their houses and habitations and the means of their livelihood." They could not endure this long. In 1606 the remnant of the Gainsborough Church fled to Holland and joined their brethren in Amsterdam. They were followed shortly afterwards by the members of the Scrooby Church under Brewster and Robinson. These, however, finding things at Amsterdam none to their liking, went on to Leyden and established there an Independent Church where Robinson laboured for the rest of his life, and from which the Pilgrim Fathers ultimately set forth.

When the Scrooby emigrants reached Amsterdam they found the Church there not only still suffering from the memory of the controversy between Johnson and his brother, but in the throes of a grievous dispute about the nature and powers of the eldership. Johnson and the majority of his followers, with the exception of

Ainsworth, contended that the duties of private Church members were confined to the election of elders. Once the elders were chosen, the rule of the Church passed into their hands, and their will was the voice of the Church. At the same time Johnson strongly asserted the independency of the individual Church. Each Church should go its own way, and had better not enter even into friendly and helpful relations with other Churches. He was thus an Independent but not a Congregationalist, or rather he combined Presbyterianism with his Independency in a way quite illegitimate. Robinson, on the other hand, was strictly Congregational, throwing full responsibility on the general membership of the Church, and denying that the elders could either rule or represent the Church. On this ground, mainly, he and his friends transferred themselves to Leyden, while Ainsworth and those who sympathized with him as against Johnson, founded another Congregational Church at Amsterdam.

The Leyden Church proved the happiest and most successful of all the Churches of the exile. It was well led by Robinson and Brewster, and had men of weight and sagacity as its deacons, such as John Carver, afterwards Governor of New Plymouth, and Samuel Fuller, an eminent physician. Its three hundred members were mostly engaged in various forms of trade and craftsmanship, though they had to work hard even to gain a competence, and were sorely put to it to provide for the poorer immigrants from England. It was not surprising, therefore, that their thoughts should turn to that New World which was then beginning to appeal to adventurous spirits and to attract many settlers. They, therefore, entered into negotiations with the

authorities in England for permission to found a colony in Virginia, and after many anxious discussions and delays their prayer was granted in the year 1620. The reasons given for taking this step are very interesting. In the first place they wished to remain Englishmen, and they feared that long residence in Holland would end in merging them in the Dutch population. Then they saw their children being subjected to many temptations through the moral laxity of the Dutch and their carelessness in regard to the observance of the Lord's Day. Further, the difficulties of making a living increased with the increase in their numbers. Some of those who joined them were compelled to return to England, while of those who remained many had to live "very meanly". But above all, they were moved, as Governor Bradford says, by "a great hope and inward zeal they had of laying some good foundation, or at least to make some way thereunto, for the propagating and advancing the Gospel of the Kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world, yea, although they should be but even as stepping-stones unto others for the performing of so great a work". Under this stress and stirred by these hopes a number of the exiles led by Brewster, Carver and Fuller, embarked on the *Speedwell* for Southampton *en route* for New England. "So", says Bradford, "they left that goodly and pleasant city which had been their resting-place near twelve years. But they knew they were pilgrims, and looked not much on those things, but lifted up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country, and quieted their spirits." ¹

¹ For the whole story, cf. Governor Bradford's *History of the Plymouth Plantation*.

Arrived in Southampton, the pilgrims were joined by the *Mayflower*, and the two vessels sailed together on August 15th, 1620. The *Speedwell* was found to be unseaworthy, and after attempts at repairing her she was discharged and the *Mayflower* sailed alone in September. She had a stormy and perilous voyage, but landed her little company of one hundred souls at Plymouth Rock on December 21st.

Of the men who inspired this pilgrimage John Robinson was unquestionably the greatest. He stands out among his contemporaries as a learned and acute theologian, and the clearest and sanest exponent of Congregational Church principles. One of his opponents says of him that "he was the most learned, modest, and polished spirit that ever that sect enjoyed". Theologically he was a convinced Calvinist and a stout champion of their cause against the Arminians. He was a voluminous writer, and as a controversialist he showed that he could keep both his head and his temper. Some of his best work, however, is quite uncontroversial, and consists of practical meditations on men and things, the product of rich experience and a well-stored mind. He quotes freely, showing wide acquaintance with ancient philosophers, the Church Fathers and Reformation theologians. His main work, however, was in defence of the Congregational system of Church order and government, and of the right of such Churches to exist.¹ Yet he is a very reluctant controversialist, and only writes because his conscience compels him and that he may bear witness to the truth. He strongly insists

¹ This defence is found chiefly in two books, *A Justification of Separation from the Church of England*, and *Just and Necessary Apology of certain Christians no less contumeliously called Brownists or Barrowists*.

on the purity of Church fellowship. The mixture of all sorts in a parish, godly and ungodly alike, may be of the essence of a National Church, but it is not truly Christian. There are many good people in the Church of England, but the system is wrong, and after much thought and travail he has come to see that separation from it is a clear duty. The Church does not consist in its rulers or officers, but in the people of God, and two or three of them met in Christ's name are as much a Church as two or three hundred. The head of the Church is Jesus Christ, and both officers and people are subject to Him alone. The bond between Minister and people is a very sacred one and can only be entered into by mutual consent. The people alone and no external power or patron can set aside for this work the man whom God has called.

As all his writings show, Robinson was a man of powerful intellect and very gracious spirit. He guided the Church at Leyden with skill and judgment, and while avoiding the extremes into which some of the Separatists fell, he stated and defended their position with uncompromising force. He was greatly beloved as one always courteous and kindly to his friends, frank in all his dealings, and a hater of dissimulation. Very characteristic is the account given of his farewell words to the Pilgrims. "We are now", he said, "ere long to part asunder, and the Lord knoweth whether ever he should see our faces again. But whether the Lord had appointed it or not he charged us before God and His blessed angels to follow him no further than he followed Christ. And if God should reveal anything to us by any other instrument of His to be as ready to receive it as ever we were to receive any truth by his ministry; for he was very

confident the Lord had more light and truth yet to break forth out of His Holy Word."

The Separatist Church at Leyden not only has the glory of founding the Congregationalism of New England, but also contributed to the replanting of Congregationalism in this country. When Abbot became Primate in 1610 there was a slight relaxation in the persecution of Separatists. Some were still kept in prison without trial, but they were not harried as they had been. The exiles, therefore, began to discuss the possibility of returning and facing once more the difficulties and dangers of planting gathered Churches in England. They were moved not only by the longing for home, but by a deep concern for the spiritual state of their own country. They believed that they had a testimony to give, and they could not rest until they had delivered it. It was under this impulse that Henry Jacob, who had been a member of the Leyden Church for six years, determined to return to London. Jacob was another of the most remarkable of the Separatist leaders. An Oxford man who had taken orders in the Anglican Church, he began early in his career to show pronounced Puritan leanings. But he had no love for Separatism and wrote strongly in defence of Anglicanism and Episcopacy against Francis Johnson. At the same time he was bent on the reformation of the Church and took an active part in petitioning James on his accession in favour of such reformation. He also discussed the subject with the Bishop of London, and because he could not agree with the Bishop's arguments was for a time imprisoned in the Clink. He wrote several pamphlets urging reform and toleration but with no sort of success. Ultimately he went to Holland and became

pastor of a Church at Middleburg ; still, however, as one holding only Puritan opinions. He entered into correspondence with Robinson, and under his influence declared himself a Congregationalist in a treatise on *The Divine Beginning and Institution of Christ's True Visible or Ministerial Church* (Leyden, 1610). In 1616 he came back to England and at once set about founding a Congregational Church in London. After consulting some of the leading Separatists in the Clink prison, he and others met for a day of prayer and fasting, then, as Waddington says,¹ "each of the brethren made open confession of his faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ ; and then, standing together, they joined hands and solemnly covenanted with each other in the presence of Almighty God, to walk together in all God's ways and ordinances according as He had revealed, or should further make known to them. Mr. Jacob was then chosen pastor by the suffrage of the brotherhood, and others were appointed to the office of deacons with fasting and prayer and imposition of hands". Of this Church Jacob remained sole minister for about eight years, and its organization set the model for all Congregational Churches at that time and practically continues to this day. The Church itself still exists as the Pilgrim Church in the New Kent Road. Jacob himself went ultimately to America, where all trace of him was lost.

In spite of the renewal of active persecution, we now hear of Independent Churches springing up in many parts of London and all over the country. John Lathrop succeeded Jacob, and in 1631 the Bishop of Exeter wrote to Laud : "I hear to my grief that there are eleven congregations (as they call them) of Separatists about

¹ *Congregational History*, vol. ii, p. 199.

the city, furnished with their idly-pretended pastors, who meet together in brewhouses and such other places of resort every Sunday." There were also many Separatists in prison, and events were soon to show that Independency had taken a far stronger hold of the people in many parts of the country than the authorities quite realized. Puritanism, too, within the Church was certainly not decreasing or becoming less active, and Puritanism everywhere worked as a kind of seed-bed of Separatism. Persecution and controversy alike served the same end, and tended to drive those who professed Puritan opinions into more logical, if more extreme, positions. It soon became evident that Puritans would find no real spirit of toleration within the Church, and the word "thorough" became a watchword in the religious sphere long before it attained any political meaning. Devout men and women up and down the land realized that loyalty to the Christian faith required them to separate from the State Church and seek to restore the pure worship and fellowship of New Testament times. Once they had taken up this position and found it justify itself in practice, they were ready to maintain and defend it at all costs.

It was during this period that the religious struggle became a civic and constitutional one, and the determining factor in producing the change was the stubborn absolutism of Archbishop Laud. Laud's policy was as short-sighted as it was drastic and effective. To him the King was the head of the Church and the Church must be made the instrument of his will. He set himself to establish absolutism in both Church and State. When Parliament refused the King's demands for money, he advised the levying of forced loans, and began the

process of "tuning the pulpits" in their support. The Bishops were told to enforce on their clergy the preaching of the King's prerogative and the religious obligation of complying with his demands. So in a sermon by Dr. Mainwaring, a King's chaplain, we read: "Among all powers that be ordained of God, the regal is most high, strong and large. Kings are, above all, inferior to none, to no man, to no multitude of men, to no angels, to no order of angels. Their power is not merely human, it is superhuman. It is a participation of God's omnipotency, which He never did communicate to any multitudes of men, but only and immediately to His own vicegerents." This kind of teaching was very little to the taste of Parliament, which was then becoming more and more intensely Puritan. It soon became war to the knife between the Commons and Laud, and the latter did not hesitate to use his most effective weapon—persecution. The treatment meted out to men like Leighton, Prynne, Burton and Bastwick was typical. For writing against the Bishops they were fined, pilloried, had their ears cut off, some of them were branded on the cheek, and all sentenced to imprisonment for life. This savage treatment not only determined the Puritans to bring Laud to account, but greatly strengthened them in their attitude of protest. It inclined them to make common cause with Separatists, and led many of them to the conclusion that there was no place left for them in England and that they must seek refuge abroad.

CHAPTER V

THE PILGRIMS IN AMERICA

IT is time now to pause for a moment in the regular course of our story and follow the fortunes of the Separatist Pilgrims in the New World. What they did and suffered counts for a great deal in the general development of Congregationalism. They had an unexampled opportunity and they used it to the full. In the free and ample air of New England and away from the shadow of an Established Church, they were able to develop and apply the principles of Church Government and order according to the New Testament model with a freedom and elasticity impossible in the old country. It is true that this very freedom also served to bring out the defects of their qualities. But all the same they made history, and their story gives ample evidence, not only of their grit and wisdom, but also of the religious, political and social value of the principles for which they stood. It was a great experiment, but one which has been tested by time and has shown more clearly than was possible elsewhere the real inwardness of the position they maintained.

It is not necessary to tell here at any length the familiar story of the early struggles of the settlers.¹

¹ This will be found in full in Dr. John Brown's *The Pilgrim Fathers of New England and their Puritan successors*. London, 1895.

When they landed it was winter-time, and they were all suffering from the privations of a long and stormy voyage. They had first to build themselves shelters against the weather, set about growing food, and put themselves in a position to ward off possible foes. The Indians, however, turned out to be unexpectedly friendly, and at first even helpful. But the little community suffered terribly from disease and soon lost some of their most valuable helpers. Among these was John Carver, their first duly appointed Governor. He was succeeded in the office by William Bradford, and it was under his leadership and that of Brewster as pastor, and Miles Standish as military captain, that the new settlement became gradually ordered and consolidated.

Our concern, however, is more with the religious side of their work, if indeed it can be distinguished as such. There is no doubt that in all they did the religious motive and aim were paramount. The question of Church organization did not greatly occupy their attention till other settlers arrived from England who were Puritans but not Separatists, and whose presence brought up again some of the problems and difficulties which the Pilgrims had fled from England to escape. This will appear in its proper place. Meanwhile the settlers worshipped God under the simple forms they had become accustomed to in John Robinson's Church, and organized themselves into a kind of Church nation on a tiny scale, regulating all their affairs in a common assembly and on the lines of the New Testament ethic as they understood it. In all they did the religious motive was supreme, and they formed a kind of Church State, or theocracy, regulated on a thoroughly democratic model. Theologically they were Calvinists, in common

with all Protestants of that period. They believed in religious liberty and in the right of the individual to worship God according to his conscience, but they were hardly prepared to recognize that Quakers and Catholics might have consciences too.¹ But they were strong men, though for the most part simple and unlettered. They and their Puritan brethren went far to justify Longfellow's words :

God had sifted three kingdoms to find the wheat
for this planting,
Then had sifted the wheat as the living seed of a
nation.

It should always be remembered that among the pioneers in the New World the Puritan element was by far the strongest, though it very speedily felt the influence of the Separatist leaven. Eight years after the settlement of the Pilgrims at Plymouth they were followed by a Puritan migration to Salem and Massachusetts Bay. The men who led this movement, Higginson and later Winthrop, represented the best elements in Puritanism. Many of their followers were "English country gentlemen of no inconsiderable fortunes, of enlarged understandings, improved by liberal education". They left England largely for religious reasons. They were Non-conformists within the Established Church, and they sought in the new land that freedom from ecclesiastical tyranny which they could not find at home. They had also a definite political motive in their desire to found a New England where all those of their way of thinking

¹ In the matter of toleration there is very little doubt that Robinson and most of the men of Plymouth were more generous than those of Boston.

might take refuge. But they were loyal subjects of the King and members of the Church. As the first of them left England, Higginson addressed them in these words : " We will not say, as the Separatists were wont to say, Farewell Babylon, Farewell Rome ; but we will say Farewell dear England, Farewell the Church of God in England. We do not go to New England as Separatists from the Church of England, though we cannot but separate from the corruptions of it ; but we go to practise the positive part of Church reformation and to propagate the Gospel in America." On the other hand, they gave the following reasons for their emigration : " Was it not a time when human worship and human inventions were grown to such an intolerable height that the consciences of God's saints, enlightened by the truth, could no longer bear them ? Was not the power of the tyrannical prelates so great that, like a strong current, it carried all down-stream before it ? Did not the hearts of men generally fail them ? Might we not say, ' This is not our resting-place ' ? We might, no doubt, have remained at home, and found a way to have filled the prisons, but whether we were called to that when there was an open door to liberty placed before us we leave to be considered. The Lord Himself knew the motives which animated us in going abroad. . . . Many longings and pantings of heart had there been in many after the Lord Jesus to see His goings in the sanctuary ; and this liberty of New England we have looked upon and thankfully received from God as the fruit of these prayers and desires." ¹ It is quite obvious that it was no part of the intention of these Puritan settlers to separate from the Church of England. But circumstances were too

¹ Quoted by Dr. John Brown, *loc. cit.*, p. 293.

strong for them. It would appear that the first few settlers at Salem under John Endicott had covenanted together and founded what was practically a Congregational Church. The facts are these. During their first winter, and while waiting for the larger body of settlers, this pioneer band suffered greatly from sickness and sent to Plymouth for help. It came in the person of Dr. Samuel Fuller, a deacon of the Plymouth Church. He told the new settlers of the mode of Church worship and organization which had been set up at Plymouth. Endicott agreed that it was what he himself believed to be right, and it would appear that the little community constituted a Church on this model. When, shortly afterwards, two Anglican clergy, Francis Higginson and Samuel Skelton, were sent out from England to take charge of the religious affairs of the new colony, Governor Endicott appointed a solemn day of humiliation for the choice of a pastor and teacher, or rather for what amounted to the re-ordination of these two men for the new work. In a contemporary letter the proceedings are described as follows : " The former part of the day being spent in prayer and teaching, the latter part about the election, which was after this manner. The persons thought on (who had been ministers in England) were demanded concerning their callings : they acknowledged there was a twofold calling, the one an inward calling, when the Lord moved the heart of a man to take that calling upon him, and fitted him with gifts for the same ; the second was an outward calling, which was from the people, when a company of believers are joined together in covenant, to walk together in all the ways of God, and every member (being men) is to have a free voice in the choice of their officers, etc. Now, we

being persuaded that these two men were so qualified, as the Apostle speaks to Timothy, where he saith, 'A Bishop must be blameless, sober, apt to teach', I think I may say, as the eunuch said unto Philip, 'What should let from being baptized, seeing there was water?' and he believed. So these two servants of God, clearing all things by their answers (and being thus fitted), we saw no reason but we might freely give our voices for their election, after this trial. Their choice was after this manner: every fit member wrote, in a note, his name whom the Lord moved him to think was fit for a pastor, and so likewise whom they would have for teacher: so the most voice was for Mr. Skelton to be Pastor, and Mr. Higginson to be Teacher; so Mr. Skelton was chosen Pastor and Mr. Higginson to be Teacher; and they accepting the choice, Mr. Higginson, with three or four of the gravest members of the Church, laid their hands on Mr. Skelton, using prayer therewith. This being done there was imposition of hands on Mr. Higginson also." ¹ This letter is extremely interesting, not merely as giving a very early account of what became the normal method of calling and ordaining Ministers in Congregational Churches, but because it shows quite clearly that the Puritan Church at Salem was already constituted and had adopted the Congregational way in Church government. The basis of the association was the following very simple form of covenant: "We covenant with the Lord and with one another; and do bind ourselves in the presence of God, to walk together in all His ways, according as He is pleased to reveal Himself unto us in His blessed word of truth." Some

¹ Quoted by Dr. Williston Walker in *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, p. 103.

few years later the members of the Salem Church "having found by sad experience how dangerous it is to sit loose to the covenant we make with our God", solemnly renewed the covenant and greatly enlarged its terms. They avowed themselves to be the people of God and subject only to Jesus Christ in all matters of worship, teaching and conversation. They promised to abstain from all occasions of offence and to walk in love towards the brethren, to study the advancement of the gospel, to carry themselves obediently to lawful authority in Church and State, and to teach their children and dependents the knowledge of God and His will. It is interesting that these covenants contain little or nothing in the way of a declaration of doctrine, and no directions for Church order save the assertion of the sole headship of Jesus Christ. But the making and repeating of such a covenant show quite clearly that the Puritan Church was as definitely Congregational as that of the Separatists. The Church of England was now a long way off, and the Puritans found that in separating themselves from those elements in it which they regarded as abuses, they had no alternative but to follow the example of the Separatists and build up their Church again on the New Testament model. This was the more remarkable in that they took a different view from the Separatists of the relation of the Church to the civil power, and were by no means so democratic in their inclinations. If it was due to the Separatist influence that the Churches of New England followed mainly the Congregational way, it was due to Puritan influence that these Churches became established Churches. In 1631 the Colony of Massachusetts decided that "No man shall be admitted to the freedom of this body politic but such as are mem-

bers of some of the Churches within the limits of the same." This identification of Church and State led to many disputes and much severity towards outsiders. Men were driven by the necessities of the situation to maintain Church discipline by civil penalties and into actions which contravened those liberties they were intended to maintain. There is no doubt that the theology of the Puritans lent itself to action of this kind. There is a good deal of Geneva in their civic life as well as in their thinking. If the Separatists at first showed a rather more liberal and tolerant spirit, they did not maintain it long.

It must be admitted, however, that the first founders of the New England Churches were an exceptional body of men. We have spoken already of Bradford and Brewster. They were followed by Winslow and Winthrop, John Eliot, Hooker and the Mathers, all of them remarkable men showing those spiritual qualities which Burke desiderates as distinguishing true statesmen from mere mechanical politicians. They had the true Puritan gravity, and a sense of responsibility which sought the good of man through the doing of the will of God. They were far removed from fanaticism and had no intention of turning their new-found liberty into licence. If they were men of their time in some respects, as in their belief in witchcraft and their treatment of witches, they were before their time in others, notably in their love for education. They founded Harvard University, and as early as 1647 set up a system of common schools, and appointed a teacher for every township of fifty householders. Of these schools James Russell Lowell writes: "This was the great discovery of our Puritan forefathers. They were the first law-

givers who saw clearly and enforced practically the simple moral and political truth, that knowledge was not an alms to be dependent on the chance charity of private men or the precarious pittance of a trust fund, but a sacred debt which the commonwealth owed to every one of her children. The opening of the first grammar school was the opening of the first trench against monopoly in Church and State ; the first row of trammels and pothooks which the little Shearjashubs and Elkanahs blotted and blubbered across their copy-books was the preamble to the Declaration of Independence.”¹

As we have seen already, the Massachusetts Puritans very readily adopted Congregational methods of Church order and government. Here Boston and Salem were at one, and as time went on and it became needful for the information of enquirers and the confutation of slanderers to give some account of the New England way, this was done in uncompromising terms. The Boston Minister, John Cotton,² in his *Questions and*

¹ *Literary Essays*, vol. ii, p. 18.

² John Cotton had been vicar of Boston in Lincolnshire and is thus described by a contemporary: “By report a man of great gravity and sanctity of life, a man of rare parts for his learning, eloquent and well-spoken, ready upon a sudden, and very apprehensive to conceive of any point in learning, though never so abstruse, insomuch that those his good gifts have won him so much credit and acceptance not only with his parishioners at Boston, but with all the ministry and men of account in those quarters, that grave and learned men, out of an admiration of those good graces of God in him, have been, and upon every occasion still are, willing to submit their judgments to his in any point of controversy as though he were some extraordinary Paraclete that could not err.” Richard Mather was a Liverpool clergyman suspended for Nonconformity in 1633. His son, Increase, was one of the first Presidents of Harvard, and his grandson, Cotton Mather, the author of *Magnalia Christi Americana*.

Answers upon Church Government, and Richard Mather in his *Church Government and Church Covenant*, make it quite clear that the reproach of Brownism was practically removed, and set forth an ecclesiastical polity identical with the Congregationalism of Barrow and Robinson. From these and other like publications one can gather a fairly clear idea of the methods and practice of Congregationalism in New England during these early years. When any company of like-minded men and women desired to form a Church, they first obtained permission of the magistrates, and then, when each had made satisfactory profession of the faith, they entered into the usual covenant with prayer and fasting. Sometimes delegates from other Churches might be present to encourage and direct the new venture. The fellowship thus organized then proceeded to elect officers and set them apart for their work with prayer and laying on of hands—a Pastor to shepherd the flock, a Teacher to instruct in doctrine, two or more ruling elders to form a kind of Committee along with the Pastor and Teacher, Deacons to serve tables and deal with temporalities, and one or more Deaconesses to care for the sick and the children of the flock. Those who wished to join the Church made application to the Elders and were examined by them, sometimes in the presence of the Church, as to their fitness and Christian experience. After a period of probation, during which any objection to the candidate could be voiced by members of the Church, there was a solemn meeting of the Church, either on a Sunday or weekday, at which the candidate made public profession of his faith and testimony was given on his behalf. If this were judged satisfactory, he was then voted upon by a show of hands,

was asked to assent to the covenant, and thus duly admitted. It was apparently the custom at Boston to require unanimity, though Salem was content with a majority vote.

On Sundays the people were called to worship by the ringing of a bell, the sounding of a horn, the beating of a drum, or the hoisting of a flag. The service was begun with prayer by the Pastor, the Teacher would then read and expound a passage of Scripture, and this was generally followed by the singing of a Psalm lined out by one of the Elders. The Pastor then preached and the Teacher closed the worship with prayer and the Benediction. The Lord's Supper was usually celebrated once a month. Dr. Dexter quotes the following account of it from a contemporary :¹ " The one of the teaching Elders prays before and blesseth and consecrates the Bread and Wine, according to the words of Institution ; the other prays at the receiving of all the members ; and next Communion, they change turns : he that began at that, ends at this ; and the Ministers deliver the bread in a charger to some of the chief, and peradventure gives to a few the Bread into their hands, and they deliver the Charger from one to another till all have eaten ; in like manner the cup, till all have drunk, goes from one to another. Then a Psalm is sung and with a short blessing the congregation is dismissed."

The ordinance of Baptism was generally administered at the close of an ordinary service and by either the Pastor or Teacher. The usual custom was to sprinkle or wash the face, with prayer and a short exhortation. The method of supporting the Churches was by voluntary contributions generally collected at a service,

¹ *Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years*, p. 453.

but sometimes from house to house. In some few places compulsory levies or taxes were imposed, but this was "very offensive to some".

As time went on and the struggle between Independency and Presbyterianism in the Mother Country became acute it was natural that some echoes of it should be heard in the New England Churches. Many of the Puritans were strongly inclined to the Presbyterian way, and were equally strongly averse from what they regarded as the looseness and license of undiluted Brownism. Nevertheless the New England Churches as a whole remained faithful to the Independent model on which they were first framed. Such modifications as they allowed had to do with what appeared to be non-essentials. On the matter of Church membership they never departed from the principle that it should be confined to those who gave evidence of their Christian standing and calling, and they were equally clear that the ultimate authority in the Church lay with the members themselves. The only authority they would allow to Church Synods was that of advice and persuasion, they had no power of compulsion in the things of God. Further, the New England Churches believed in liberty of conscience and the practice of entire religious toleration. Their opponents objected that "Many of them preach, and some print, a liberty of conscience, at least the great equity of a toleration for all religions: that every man should be permitted, without any fear so much as of discountenance from the magistrate, to profess publicly his conscience, were he never so erroneous, and also live according thereunto, if he trouble not the public peace by any seditious or wicked practice." This exactly expressed the position in which the Indepen-

dents gloried. They argued that they stripped it of its dangers for themselves by their Church discipline and the power of excommunication, but that for outsiders they must grant the same freedom as they had themselves always claimed. Dr. Dexter therefore concludes: "All of this goes to endorse the judgment which we have reached from other sources of evidence, that the early Congregationalism of this country (i.e. America) was Barrowism and not Brownism—a Congregationalized Presbyterianism, or a Presbyterianized Congregationalism—which had its roots in one system and its branches in the other ; which was essentially Genevan within the local congregation and essentially other outside of it. The forty or fifty Churches which 'for the substance of it' adopted the Cambridge platform held this general system indeed with varying degrees of strictness—from the almost Presbyterianism of Hingham and Newbury to the large-minded and large-hearted Robinsonism of the Mother Mayflower Church." ¹ As we have already seen, the men of Salem differed from those of Plymouth in retaining a certain belief in the State Church principle. They allowed the civil power a duty and authority in matters of religion, and they limited the political franchise to Church members. Churches generally kept discipline in their own hands, but when the Church failed the State could step in and impose its own penalties. As time went on this became a fruitful cause of trouble and intolerance. The freedom the Puritans won was freedom within strict limits.

¹ Dexter, *Congregationalism as seen in its Literature*, p. 463.

CHAPTER VI

THE RISE OF THE INDEPENDENTS

THE closing years of the reign of King James were marked by the attempt to force Episcopacy upon Scotland and by an increased persecution of Puritanism in this country. James died in 1625, regretted by no one, and the accession of Charles I was looked upon by the Puritans as a relief. Charles was known as a serious man, chaste and devout in his private life, and in many respects a refreshing contrast to his predecessor. He had a great opportunity, but it very soon became clear that he was not likely to use it. In politics he put himself into the hands of his favourite, Buckingham, and in ecclesiastical matters was the very willing tool of Bishop Laud. The result was that the Puritan protest, accentuated by persecution, took on a political form. They became as zealous for civil liberty as they had been for liberty in religion. The absolutism of Charles found in Puritan opposition the rock on which it was ultimately broken to pieces. The same is true of the extreme Anglicanism of Laud. His assertion of divine right of Episcopacy as well as of the divine right of kings, and his determined efforts to purge the Church of every Puritan taint only served to consolidate the forces against him and to bring about his undoing. The movement for political freedom took shape in the Petition of Right which pledged the King

not to impose taxes without the consent of Parliament, while the cause of religious freedom was splendidly maintained by the Covenanters in Scotland and the Independents in the English Parliament and its army. With the political welter of the early years of Charles' reign we are not concerned, save in so far as to observe that the policy of Buckingham and Laud stiffened the backs of many of the Puritans and drove them into the ranks of those whose motto was Root and Branch reform. It soon became plain that Episcopacy in the Church went hand in hand with tyranny in the State, and the execution of Strafford and the imprisonment and subsequent execution of Laud were both parts of the same subversive policy. Thoughtful Englishmen everywhere recognized that their most precious rights and liberties were in danger, and were prepared to take the most drastic measures to maintain them.

It was in this temper that the Long Parliament met in November 1640. Its composition was predominantly Puritan, and it soon made manifest its hostility to the King and his policy, and its determination to maintain the liberties of the people. Two years later the civil war broke out, and from that time for many years the nation knew no respite from strife. For the moment, however, the religious question overshadowed all others, and one of the first acts of the Parliament was to appoint the Westminster Assembly of Divines to confer "of such matters and things touching and concerning the Liturgy, Discipline and Government of the Church of England as shall be proposed to them by Both or either of the said Houses of Parliament and no other ; and to deliver their opinions and advises of or touching the matters aforesaid, as shall be most agreeable to the

Word of God, to Both or either of the said Houses from time to time". The Assembly met in July 1623, under the Presidency of Dr. Twisse of Newbury, a rigid Calvinist. It held 1,163 sessions and ultimately died with the Parliament that gave it birth. Its permanent monument is to be found in the Westminster Confession of Faith, and its discussions will ever be memorable for bringing to a head the conflict between Presbyterianism and Independency, and for the attempt to substitute the divine right of Presbytery for that of Bishops and King. The great majority in the Assembly were Presbyterians, and as such were largely in the hands of the Scottish Commissioners. Parliament needed the help of Scotland against the King, and the price of that help was the adoption in England of the solemn League and Covenant, and the establishment of the National Church on a rigidly Presbyterian model. In its willingness to accept these terms the Presbyterian majority, while it represented Parliament, certainly did not represent the people of this country. When the Presbyterian model was set up not more than half the counties accepted it, and those by no means whole-heartedly. Men soon realized the truth of Milton's jibe, that "New Presbyter was but old priest writ large", and were by no means inclined to exchange one form of religious tyranny for another. The country as a whole was for freedom, both civil and religious, and ultimately put the power into the hands of the men who stood for this cause. The few Independents in the Assembly did their work well and counted for far more than their numbers warranted. Conspicuous among them were Philip Nye, Thomas Goodwin—called the atlas of Independency—William Bridge, Jeremiah

Burroughs and Sidrach Simpson. These men, along with the Independents in Parliament led by Cromwell, accepted the Solemn League and Covenant, and on theological questions also were in general agreement with the Assembly as a whole. Where they differed and pressed their differences was in the first place on questions relating to the nature of the Church and its membership. The Independents stood firmly by their belief that every company of men and women meeting in the name of Christ and regularly organized for fellowship and worship is a Church in immediate relationship with Christ and responsible to Him alone. They could not allow any authority to come in between and determine either the creed or practice of the Church, any more than they could allow such authority to rule over the conscience of the individual Christian. They were quite willing to sanction the appointing of Synods for promoting fellowship between the Churches and dealing with difficulties as they arose, but they denied to such Synods any authoritative jurisdiction. Every separate Church must maintain its independence. The Presbyterians admitted the legitimacy of this position and acknowledged that Churches so formed, in cases of necessity, were true Churches with a regular ministry and valid sacraments. But they regarded them as abnormal and their existence as incompatible with that uniform system which they wished to set up. They stood, therefore, for an establishment of Presbytery in which every individual congregation was subject in all things to the Provincial Synod in the first instance, and ultimately to the National Assembly. This was the system which Parliament came to sanction for the whole country, though the Five Dissenting Brethren

(as the leading Independents came to be called) stood out against it to the last.

A much more serious ground of dispute was the question of toleration, or as the Independents used to term it, liberty of conscience. The time was one of great religious unrest. Sober people were sorely disturbed by the vagaries of innumerable sects. Anabaptists, Brownists, Antinomians, Seekers, Arians and Socinians were all active and vehement in propagating their peculiar views, and in the popular mind were lumped together as all equally dangerous and blasphemers. The Presbyterian remedy for this chaos was a uniform system of doctrine and worship enforced and protected by the civil power. The Independents, however, thought otherwise. They knew that liberty had its dangers, but they judged them to be preferable to those of a rigid and enforced uniformity, and from this position they have never swerved. They were prepared to suffer the wheat and the tares to grow together, and they trusted in the Spirit of God to lead men into all the truth. These views were set forth by the Five Dissenting Brethren in *An Apologeticall Narration of some Ministers formerly Exiles in the Netherlands ; now members of the Assembly of Divines*. In this they argued their case over again, pleading for the liberty and spiritual autonomy of the individual Church, and insisting that the membership of the Church should be confined to those who are "faithful". They also urged that the Congregational system provided ample safeguards against heresy or sin on the part of Churches or individuals, in that such could be excommunicated from fellowship as easily as under Presbyterian government. They further showed that, with all their love of

liberty, they were prepared to yield more to the civil power than were the Presbyterians. They insisted that the freedom of the Church could not really infringe the power of Parliament, and that magistrates must be allowed to decide whether an ecclesiastical offence was serious enough to be brought under their jurisdiction. Churches were to be free to govern themselves and order their own affairs, but the last word must be with the civil power. This contention gave great offence to the Presbyterians, whose assertion of the Crown rights of Jesus Christ meant the setting up of an ecclesiastical authority which should be the direct rival of Parliament. In a speech in the Assembly, Philip Nye directly attacked the Presbyterian proposals. "It is inconvenient to nourish such a vast body in the commonwealth—a body over which Parliament can have no direct and effective control. The power of this great ecclesiastical system is as great as that of the civil government itself; it covers the whole nation; it is armed with a force even greater than that which defends the prerogatives of thrones or Parliaments; for it is a spiritual authority and binds the consciences of men. If it is unsafe for a great commonwealth to have within it so great and formidable a power, it is neither for this Assembly nor Parliament to lay the foundation of it. The safety of the commonwealth is the supreme law."¹

The protest which Nye thus voiced, though it met with little support in the Assembly outside the small group of Independents, had a far wider measure of support in Parliament and throughout the country. The victory of Marston Moor in July 1644, had put Cromwell in a very strong position, and the first use he

¹ Quoted by Dr. Dale, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

made of it was to try to curb the intolerance of the Presbyterian majority. It was at his instance that the House of Commons passed the following "high and unexpected order": "That the Committee of Lords and Commons appointed to treat with the Commissioners of Scotland and the Committee of the Assembly, do take into consideration the differences in opinion of the members of the Assembly in point of Church government, and do endeavour a union if it be possible; and in case that cannot be done, do endeavour the finding out some ways how far tender consciences, who cannot in all things submit to the common rule which shall be established, may be borne with according to the Word, and as may stand with the Public Peace, that so the proceedings of the Assembly may not be so much retarded." These words mark the beginning of a controversy between the Assembly and Parliament in which neither side was victorious, but which caused both to play into the hands of Cromwell and the Independents. After many vicissitudes and much wrangling the Presbyterian system was accepted by Parliament and imposed on the country, though, as we have seen, it never became really effective. It broke on its own intolerance and against the "tender consciences" of multitudes of men and women throughout the land. It was not suited either to the genius or the religious needs of the English people, who were far more disposed to freedom and tolerance in matters of faith than many of their ecclesiastical spokesmen. The more immediate cause of their failure, however, was the rise to power of Cromwell and the army, and to this we must now turn.

It is now generally agreed that Cromwell's own character and his policy in remodelling his army and filling

it with men like-minded with himself were the decisive elements in the situation. He was not afraid of Anabaptists and sectaries if only they were men faithful to their duty and to the State. He sought for men who "had some conscience in what they did", and from them he manned an army that was irresistible in the field, and that became a most powerful political engine.

✓ Cromwell himself was a remarkable combination of the mystic and the man of action. He had the religious temperament of a fanatic, though his shrewd horse-sense kept it generally under control. What sometimes seemed to outsiders like duplicity was due to an unconscious conflict of motives through which the prophet and the plain man were ever at odds. One of the best contemporary pictures of Cromwell is that given by his house steward, John Maidstone, and is worth quoting in full. "Before I pass further, pardon me in troubling you with the character of his person, which, by reason of my nearness to him, I had opportunity well to observe. His body was well compact and strong; his stature under six feet (I believe about two inches), his head so shaped as you might see in it a storehouse and shop both of a vast treasury of natural parts. His temper exceeding fiery, as I have known, but the flame of it kept down for the most part or soon allayed with those moral endowments he had. He was naturally compassionate towards objects in distress, even to an effeminate measure; though God had made him a heart wherein was left little room for any fear but what was due to Himself, of which there was a large proportion, yet did he exceed in tenderness toward sufferers. A larger soul, I think, hath seldom dwelt in a house of clay than his was. I do believe if his story

were impartially transmitted, and the unprejudiced world well possessed with it, she would add him to her nine worthies and make that number a decemvire. He lived and died in comfortable communion with God as judicious persons near him well observed. He was that Mordecai that sought the welfare of his people and spake peace to his seed. Yet were his temptations such, as it appeared frequently that he that hath grace enough for many men may have too little for himself, the treasure he had being but in an earthen vessel and that equally defiled with original sin as any other man's nature is." ¹

In Church polity Cromwell had become a strict Independent. He believed that the Church should be constituted only of professing Christians, and that Jesus Christ was its only head. He was strongly in favour of toleration, though he came to admit the necessity of putting some kind of limit upon it. When the New Model was first set up he was prepared to admit into it men of any religious opinions unfavourable to Presbyterianism, and there is no doubt that he lent himself to the movement for excluding Presbyterians from being either officers or Chaplains. But when the Independent majority was secure, and the army had settled down to a sober form of Congregationalism, he showed himself quite ready to purge it of Antinomians, Quakers, Fifth Monarchy men and other extremists. Such liberty as was allowed, therefore, was liberty only within quite definite limits. At the same time he encouraged religion in his army in every possible way. Chaplains were appointed whenever and wherever they could be found, and there was much preaching both by

¹ *Winthrop Papers*, 3rd series, vol. i, p. 185.

officers and privates. Prayers and psalm singing both before and after battle were quite usual. But it is not true that every soldier carried a Bible in his knapsack, and Cromwell himself had nothing to do with the Soldier's Bible that is often called by his name.¹

As the strength and influence of the army grew, Independency naturally came into greater prominence. The dissolution of the Long Parliament marked the defeat of Presbyterianism, and the establishment of the Protectorate set Independents everywhere in the seats of the mighty. On the whole they used their power with moderation, though some of them were hardly true to their principles in accepting high ecclesiastical office under the State and in tacitly acquiescing in the establishment of their particular kind of religion. The reorganization of the Church was undertaken by a Commission of Triers consisting of thirty-three ministers and ten laymen. Before these all candidates for the ministry were tested, and only appointed to benefices as they were judged to be fit. The tests imposed had to do with capacity for preaching, character and learning. According to the testimony of Richard Baxter—by no means a favourable witness, for he neither loved nor trusted Cromwell—the system worked well and definitely raised the moral and intellectual status of the ministry throughout the land. No doubt some injustice was done, especially in the exclusion from their livings of known High Churchmen and supporters of the Stuarts. But many Anglicans of moderate opinions were allowed to retain their cures, and among the new men appointed were large numbers of Presbyterians and

¹ For a full account of Religion in the Army, cf. Sir Charles Firth's *Cromwell's Army*, pp. 313-348.

some Baptists, as well as Independents. In addition, members of other sects were allowed freedom of worship, a freedom only denied to Quakers and Unitarians. Cromwell was himself more tolerant than most of the ministers. Baxter wrote of him: "The Lord Protector is noted as a man of a Catholic spirit, desirous of the unity and peace of all the servants of Christ." Had he lived longer he would no doubt have had greater success in his efforts to spread this spirit of peace and unity.

One of the first effects of the rise of the Independents to power was the effort to agree on some form of declaration of faith, which might serve for Congregationalism as the Westminster Confession did for the Presbyterians. Many of the Independent leaders pressed for such a statement of faith in the interests of order and unity, apparently oblivious of the fact that any attempt to enforce uniformity was quite alien to the genius of Congregationalism. Cromwell at least recognized the danger, and it was only with the greatest reluctance that he consented to summon a meeting of representatives of the Congregational Churches in the Chapel of the old Savoy Palace in order to discuss the question. By the time that the Savoy Conference met, however, Cromwell was dead, and the confusion of the times both overshadowed and hastened its operations. A Committee was formed, consisting of Owen, Goodwin, Nye, Bridge, Caryl and Greenhill, to draw up a declaration of faith which, when submitted to the whole Conference, was unanimously adopted. The proceedings lasted only eleven days, which was interpreted to mean that the Holy Spirit was very specially present and concerned in the work. The Savoy Declaration of 1658 gives clear

and full expression to the principles of Congregationalism, both theological and ecclesiastical, as by this time generally accepted. Doctrinally it simply repeats the statements of the Westminster Confession with some slight modifications. The really important point here is that it states quite clearly the traditional Independent belief in the toleration of opinions, and lays down once and for all the position which the Congregational Churches have ever since then taken with regard to creeds or confessions of faith. They hold it to be quite legitimate for the Churches to state from time to time the articles of their faith, but these "are not to be made use of as an imposition upon any. Whatever is of force or constraint in matters of this nature, causeth them to degenerate from the name and nature of confessions, and turns them from being confessions of faith into Exactions and Impositions of Faith". While they thus definitely repudiated any compulsory uniformity of opinion, they were still far from conceding complete religious liberty. They were all for toleration, but it was toleration within strict limits. They agree that there ought to be vouchsafed a "forbearance and mutual indulgence unto saints of all persuasions that keep unto and hold fast the necessary Foundations of Faith and Holiness in all other matters, extra fundamental, whether of Faith or Order". But at the same time they are not prepared to allow to any men "the freedom to vent and vend their own vain and accursed imaginations contrary to the great and fixed truths of the Gospels". In spite of this, however, the Declaration omits those clauses of the Westminster document which give to the Civil Magistrate authority over the doctrine and ordinances of the Church. If there is to

be any enforcing or exclusion of heretics, it is to be carried out by the Church itself.

Appended to the Declaration are some thirty propositions "Of the Institution of Churches and the order appointed in them by Jesus Christ". These set forth a Barrowist view of Congregationalism, insisting on the spiritual independence of the individual Church and on the necessity of the Christian calling and profession for Church membership. It also allows for the formation of Synods or Councils of Churches for mutual help and advice, so long as such Councils do not usurp any authority or jurisdiction over the Churches composing them. The whole document thus sets forth the Congregational polity as it had been hammered out in the controversies of a hundred years, and as it has remained from that time to the present practically without serious modification.

The transformation of these English Independents within the short period of some ten years, from a despised sect into a victorious political party, is one of the most remarkable events in our national history. The reason for it is to be found, not in the outstanding character and abilities of the leading men involved, but in the fact that moral and spiritual forces in the long run always outweigh the material. The Independents were moved in all they did by an intense passion for liberty of conscience. This made them inevitably defenders of civil liberty also, and all those who believed in civil liberty for its own sake had naturally to range themselves on their side. The fact that many of their allies were not inspired by the same purity of motive as themselves contributed not a little later on to their undoing.

CHAPTER VII

PERSONS AND PRINCIPLES

WE have now seen how Independency came to its own during the period of the Commonwealth. Its triumph, however, was short-lived and was never complete. Political exigencies compelled Cromwell and his advisers to set up a kind of State Church, and to appoint their nominees to incumbencies and other offices under what would, in other circumstances, have been the Crown. This formed a mould into which Independency fitted very badly, and in the short time available the condition reached was never more than one of very unstable equilibrium. The country was still predominantly Anglican or at least indifferent, and was no more ready for the domination of the Independents than it had been for that of the Presbyterians. The Presbyterians, too, in spite of the fact that their ministers were freely appointed to cures, were restive and more or less hostile. Add to this the fact that the Independents themselves were divided, some of them standing out for a more complete autonomy than was possible under the conditions then prevailing. Milton spoke for many beside himself when he taunted those who were willing to be dependent on the State for their maintenance as being very poor Independents. The State system which Cromwell set up as the only one possible under the circumstances, though far broader

and more tolerant than the Presbyterian one which it supplanted, was quite alien to Congregational principles and the Congregational genius. As has often been remarked, the Independent ascendancy was the beginning of the Independent decline, and the period of decline which now set in can only be understood in the light of the difficulties and controversies of the Commonwealth. It may be useful, therefore, if at this stage we break off our narrative and give some account of the leading men of this period, and of the various positions within Congregationalism which they represent.

Foremost among them is John Milton, who, beginning as a moderate Puritan, was driven into the ranks of Independency, partly by reaction against Presbyterian intolerance, and partly by the necessity which was laid upon him of vindicating the freedom of the Press. This love of liberty became Milton's guiding star, and he followed it unswervingly in all the distractions of the time, religious and political. As Mark Pattison says, "He defended religious liberty against the Prelates, civil liberty against the Crown, the liberty of the Press against the executive, liberty of conscience against the Presbyterians, and domestic liberty against the tyranny of canon law. Milton's pamphlets might have been stamped with the motto which Selden inscribed in Greek in all his books, 'Liberty before everything.'"¹ It was this intense devotion to liberty which led Milton to dissent from Cromwell's policy of a State Church on the same grounds as those on which he had opposed the Prelacy of Charles. "Here Milton seems to have remained throughout upon the old Independent Platform; he will not have the civil power

¹ *Life of Milton: English Men of Letters*, p. 69.

step over its limits into the province of religion at all. Many matters in which the old prelate Church had usurped upon the domain of the State, should be replaced under the secular authority. But the spiritual region was a matter of conscience, and not of external regulation." ¹ It was quite in accord with this general position that Milton should object strongly to the State payment of Ministers of religion. To him the endowment of religion was as offensive as its establishment. In his pamphlet entitled *Considerations touching means to remove hirelings out of the Church* (1659) he writes : "Under force, though no thank to the forcers, true religion ofttimes best thrives and flourishes ; but the corruption of teachers, most commonly the effect of hire, is the very bane of truth in them who are so corrupted." In this matter, as in others, Milton was clearly in advance of his time. He stood firmly for a Free Church in a Free State. Even in his Presbyterian days and in one of his earliest pamphlets he had written : "When every good Christian, thoroughly acquainted with all those glorious privileges of sanctification and adoption which render him more sacred than any dedicated altar or element, shall be restored to his right in the Church, and not excluded from such place of spiritual government as his Christian abilities and his approved good life in the eye and testimony of the Church shall prefer him to Then would the congregation of the Lord soon recover the true likeness and visage of what she is indeed, a holy generation, a royal priesthood, a saintly communion, the household and city of God. And this I hold to be another considerable reason why the functions of Church govern-

¹ *Life of Milton : English Men of Letters*, p. 123.

ment ought to be free and open to any Christian man, though never so laic, if his capacity, his faith, and prudent demeanour commend him. And this the Apostles warrant us to do." It was quite in the spirit of these words that he wrote many years later in his sonnet to Cromwell :

Help us to save free conscience from the law
Of hireling wolves whose gospel is their maw.

In this respect at least "our chief of men" must have disappointed his follower. But Milton remained loyal to him while doing no violence to his own convictions. He was one of the earliest advocates of the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church, and that on the grounds which still hold good for Free Churchmen in these days. His poems and his posthumous Latin treatise on Christian doctrine show him to have been a sincere Christian as well as a bold and original theologian. After the Restoration he was in great danger and only escaped with his life through the influence of Andrew Marvell and other friends. He spent the remainder of his darkened days in semi-retirement, and ceased to attend any form of Christian worship. But he had done his work and the seed sown in his pamphlets bore much fruit after many days.

The divergence of view among the Independents of the Commonwealth illustrated, as we have seen, by Milton and Cromwell, appears in another form in the case of the two Goodwins, John and Thomas. John Goodwin, a Cambridge graduate and vicar of St. Stephen's, Coleman Street, was ejected for his anti-Presbyterian tendencies in 1644. He then formed an

Independent congregation near his old Church, where he continued to minister for the rest of his days. Unlike most Independents of the time, he was a convinced Arminian, and stood firmly for Free Grace and a Universal redemption at a time when these doctrines were accounted the worst of heresies. He was a learned, voluminous and often bitter writer, and a controversialist of no mean order. He championed the cause of Cromwell and defended the execution of Charles in a famous pamphlet. But he opposed the policy of the Triers, whom he called "Tormenters", and whose work he regarded as inimical to true religious liberty. At the Restoration he was passed over, probably on account of his Arminian sympathies. His name and work were revived by John Wesley on the same theological grounds, and his assertion of theological freedom made him, as was said at the time, one who "made more noise in the world than any other person of his age, rank or profession". Thomas Goodwin, on the other hand, was a convinced and militant Calvinist. Also a Cambridge man and Fellow of Catherine Hall, he was appointed vicar of Trinity Church in 1632. Two years later, under pressure from the followers of Laud, he resigned his living and left Cambridge. For a time he ministered to a small congregation in Holland, but returned to London after the impeachment of Laud and became pastor of an Independent Church in Lime Street, where he soon won fame as a preacher. Calamy says of him: "He was a considerable scholar and an eminent divine, and had a very happy faculty in descanting upon Scripture so as to bring forth surprising remarks which yet generally tended to illustration." He was a member of the Westminster

Assembly, where he threw in his lot with the Dissenting Brethren and became a leader among them. In 1650 he was made President of Magdalen College, Oxford, where he remained till the Restoration. He was a great friend and ally of Cromwell, and his prolix and learned writings did much for the cause of Calvinistic theology and Independent polity. The following delightful caricature of Goodwin at Magdalen is drawn by Addison in the *Spectator*. A young man "with a good cargo of Latin and Greek" waited on him in order to be examined for entrance into the College. "He was received at the door by a servant who was one of that gloomy generation that were then in fashion. He conducted him, with great silence and seriousness, to a long gallery which was darkened at noonday and had only a single candle burning in it. After a short stay in this melancholy apartment he was led into a chamber hung with black, where he entertained himself for some time by the glimmering of a taper, till at length the head of the College came out to him from an inner room, with half a dozen night-caps upon his head and religious horror in his countenance. The young man trembled; but his fears increased when, instead of being asked what progress he had made in learning, he was examined how he abounded in grace. His Latin and Greek stood him in little stead, he was to give an account only of the state of his soul, whether he was of the number of the elect; what was the occasion of his conversion; upon what day of the month and hour of the day it happened; how it was carried on and when completed. The whole examination was summed up in one short question, namely, *whether he was prepared for death?* The boy who had been bred up by honest

parents, was frightened out of his wits by the solemnity of the proceeding, and by the last dreadful interrogatory ; so that upon making his escape from the house of mourning, he could never be brought a second time to the examination, as not being able to go through the terrors of it."

A greater man than either of the Goodwins was John Owen. Born and bred a Puritan, he was educated at Queen's College, Oxford, but had to leave the University under Laud's new statutes. After a period of religious doubt and uncertainty he found refuge in an unbending Calvinism, and was given the living of Fordham in Essex, from which a "scandalous" minister had been ejected. He became more and more inclined to Independency, and ultimately accepted the pastorate of an Independent Church at Coggeshall, which had a number of Flemish emigrants among its members. A controversy with Baxter brought him into public notice, and he was several times chosen to preach before the Long Parliament. Cromwell was greatly taken with his sense and earnestness. He made him his chaplain and took him to Ireland that he might help in settling the affairs of Trinity College. Owen accompanied Cromwell also on his Scottish campaign. In 1651, Cromwell, as Chancellor of Oxford, made Owen Dean of Christ Church, and in the following year nominated him as Vice-Chancellor of the University. He found the University in a very sorry condition and almost moribund. In his efforts to reform it he was ably seconded by Thomas Goodwin. These two, "the Atlases and patriarchs of Independency", as Anthony Wood called them, succeeded at last in making Oxford once more a place where true religion and sound learning

flourished. Owen was a voluminous theological writer, and in spite of his Calvinism showed a broad human sympathy and a fearless love of freedom such as made his writings very widely acceptable. More than most Independents of his time, however, he believed in a certain credal uniformity, and refused to follow Cromwell all the way in his policy of toleration. In spite of its Calvinistic rigour, Owen's theology is instinct with life and breathes a passionate devotion to the person of Jesus Christ. At the same time he teaches a strictly limited atonement, is bitterly hostile to Arminianism, and strongly criticizes all those moderate forms of Calvinism which tend to diminish the severity of its predestinarianism. In his *Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1647) he argues that the work of Christ must be judged from the end or purpose which it serves. This end is the salvation of the elect, and that it actually accomplishes. The Atonement, therefore, was an exact satisfaction or equivalent for the sins of the elect, an endurance on the part of Christ of the punishment for which they were liable, a punishment which was "essentially the same in weight and pressure, though not in all accidents of duration and the like, for it was impossible that He should be detained by death".

Owen is supposed to have been responsible for the long, confused and wordy preface to the Savoy Declaration. If so, it certainly does him no great credit, though there is one brief paragraph which we may judge from other indications expressed his mind: "Secondly let this be added (or superadded rather), to give full weight and measure (even to running over), that we have all along this reason held forth (though quarreled with for it by our brethren) this great principle of these times,

that amongst all Christian States and Churches there ought to be vouchsafed a forbearance and mutual indulgence unto Saints of all persuasions, that keep unto and hold fast the necessary foundations of faith and holiness, in all other matters extra fundamental whether of Faith or Order." These are certainly Owen's sentiments, and he meant them. Words like toleration and indulgence, which later came to acquire a very sinister meaning for Dissenters, meant on his lips something very different.¹ In this, as in other respects, Owen was before his time, and stands as the best example of the true spirit of Independency. It was quite in accordance with this spirit that he should write to the New England Congregationalists and warmly remonstrate with them on their persecuting spirit. After the Restoration, Owen was one of the first to congratulate Charles on his Declaration of Indulgence for which he drew up an address of thanks. Under Indulgence he became one of the preachers in the weekly lectures jointly established by Presbyterians and Independents at Pinner's Hall in Broad Street. He enjoyed the friendship of many notable people, and was not infrequently consulted both by Charles and James, and made the medium of some of their charity to Dissenters. He was a great admirer of John Bunyan and helped to procure his release from jail. During his later years he wrote continually, sometimes controversially as against Stillingfleet on separation, but generally confining himself to the exposition of Christian doctrine and the defence of Evangelical Free Church principles. Owen

¹ At the same time it is obvious that Owen was not *persona grata* even to all his friends. William Hooke, writing to Mather in 1677, describes him as "valetudinarius and crazy"; cf. *Transactions of the Congregational History Society*, ix, p. 265.

stood for a Barrowist type of Congregationalism, but differed from some of his contemporaries in contending for a more numerous eldership. He feared lest the power in a Church should be concentrated in the hands of one or of a few, and thought that there would be safety in numbers. More than most, Owen was a High Churchman with a strong sense of the mystical quality of the Church as the home of the Holy Spirit and the organ and instrument of Christ in the world. He had in himself a vein of deep piety and a strong in belief and love for Jesus Christ.¹

¹ The best life of Owen is Orme's, and there is an excellent selection from his writings with an historical introduction, called *The Golden Book of John Owen*, by Prof. James Moffatt.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RESTORATION

WHEN Charles II came to the throne he found the Presbyterians once more dominant both in Parliament and in the nation. Indeed, it was their dislike of Cromwell and their hostility to the Independent regime that were mainly responsible for their part in bringing back the King. Charles had made fair promises of liberty for tender consciences, and the Presbyterians evidently thought that they were powerful enough to make him keep his word. But they soon discovered their mistake. At first the King spoke them fair, appointed some ten or twelve of them royal Chaplains, and encouraged the hope of a scheme of Church government which both they and the Episcopalians could accept. In 1660 he issued a Declaration of Indulgence in which the following words occur: "And because the passion and uncharitableness of the times have produced several opinions in religion, by which men are engaged in parties and animosities against each other, which, when they shall hereafter unite in a freedom of conversation will be composed and better understood; we do declare a liberty to tender consciences, and that no man shall be disquieted or called in question for differences of opinion in matters of religion which do not disturb the peace of the kingdom, and that we shall be ready to consent to such an

act of Parliament as upon mature deliberation shall be offered to us for the full granting of that indulgence." This seemed at first to open up a prospect of a Church remodelled on a new and comprehensive basis. In connection with it an appeal was made for some measure of toleration for Independents, Anabaptists and other sectaries. All that was asked was that they should be allowed liberty to worship in their own way so long as it involved no disturbance of the peace. This the Presbyterians refused to grant because they saw that, if it were conceded, Roman Catholics would have to be granted the same liberty. For this very reason the King desired it, and though he consented to the Declaration in the form that the Presbyterians wished, there is no doubt that he greatly disliked it, and ultimately used all his influence to prevent it being embodied in an act of Parliament.

Abortive though it proved, this Declaration of Indulgence, and the proposals to which it gave rise for reconstructing the Church on a broader basis, are both interesting and important in view of recent discussions on the reunion of the Churches. The problem in both cases was the same, and there is a familiar sound about some of the solutions suggested. Chief among these was the abolition of Prelacy and the setting up of a constitutional form of Episcopacy, no Bishop being able to ordain or exercise ecclesiastical jurisdiction without the advice and assistance of the Presbytery. Further, admission to the Lord's Supper was henceforth to be by way of confession of faith, and a promise of obedience to the will of God. Provision was also made for a joint commission of Episcopalians and Presbyterians to revise the Prayer Book, and for the abolition of surplices,

the sign of the Cross, kneeling at the Lord's Supper, and bowing at the name of Jesus. For a time it seemed as though there were a real chance of reconstituting the Church on this agreed basis. Certain Presbyterian ministers were offered bishoprics and deaneries and no question of reordination was raised. Men were only waiting for the declaration to be ratified by Parliament. This, however, was never done and there is very little doubt that the King and his courtiers never intended that it should be done. Charles was quite willing to humour the Presbyterians until his position was secure. But he was anxious to maintain his royal prerogative as head of the Church, and he had no intention of doing anything to make the position of Roman Catholics more difficult. Parliament knew his mind, and, so far from legalizing the Declaration, proceeded to restore to their livings all those clergy who had been ejected since the outbreak of the civil war, whether for loyalty to the monarchy, incompetence or other cause.

This, however, was only a beginning. In 1661, Venner's Insurrection, a mad rising of fifth monarchy men, broke out, and gave a welcome excuse for repressive measures against all sectaries. In vain did Congregationalists, Baptists and Quakers protest their loyalty to the Crown. Their meetings were prohibited as seditious, and many of them flung into prison. But worse was to follow. The new Parliament contained only about fifty Presbyterians and was otherwise strongly Royalist and Episcopalian. It at once set about the task of restoring all the privileges of the Church of England, and in spite of all the opposition of the Presbyterians and of some half-hearted attempts at compromise by the House of Lords, it ultimately passed

an "Act for the Uniformity of Public prayers and administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies ; and for establishing the Form of Making, Ordaining and Consecrating, Bishops, Priests and Deacons in the Church of England". The passing of this Act was the birth of modern Nonconformity and turned the Church of England into a sect. It was intended by it to secure absolute uniformity in all public religious services throughout this country. It was therefore required of every Minister of religion that on or before the next feast of St. Bartholomew he should, on pain of being deprived of his living, make the following declaration :

I do here declare my unfeigned assent and consent to all and everything contained and prescribed in and by the book entitled the Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, according to the use of the Church of England, together with the Psalter or Psalms of David pointed as they are to be sung or said in Churches ; and the form and manner of making, ordaining and consecrating of Bishops, Priests and Deacons.

The Act further required that all Ministers, University teachers and schoolmasters should make a declaration against taking up arms against the King, repudiating the solemn League and Covenant and expressing conformity to the Liturgy of the Church of England. There is no mistaking the intention of this Act. It was to drive out of the Church of England all who would not accept the full Episcopalian position, and it succeeded. In spite of the fact that very few of them had the opportunity of seeing the new Prayer Book to which they

were expected to conform, when the fatal day arrived nearly two thousand Ministers refused to perjure themselves. They were supported by all those whom the preamble of the Act of Uniformity, which long remained on the statute book of these realms, described as "A great number of people who, following their own sensuality and living without knowledge and due fear of God, do wilfully and schismatically abstain and refuse to come to their Parish Churches." The Act of Uniformity was followed in 1664 by the Conventicle Act which forbade any Nonconformist to hold a meeting at which more than five people should be present in addition to his own family. This was followed in 1665 by the Five Mile Act which prohibited Ministers from coming within five miles of any corporate borough. In 1670 the Conventicle Act was revised and the penalties under it increased, and in 1673 the Test Act was passed which closed to Nonconformists all employment under the Government. It is needless to dwell on the suffering which these repeated measures of persecution caused. They entirely failed of their intention, for there can be "no compulsion in things of the mind". The Presbyterians, with very few exceptions, were as staunch as the Independents and Baptists. Men like Baxter, Caryl and Bates stood side by side with Owen, Howe and Goodwin and made a real stand for liberty of conscience. From this time forward, however, Presbyterianism began to decline and Congregationalism to increase. Under the circumstances this was quite natural. As the ejected Ministers were able here and there to gather congregations around them, the Churches so formed inevitably followed the Independent model. Anything like the close organization of Presbyterianism

was difficult to carry out, and did not suit the religious genius of this country as it did that of Scotland.

During the twenty-six years between the Restoration and the Revolution, save for brief periods of Indulgence, Nonconformity was under the ban of the Law. Parliament was implacably hostile, and showed in many ways its determination to root out conventicles and crush Dissent. Thousands of persons were imprisoned and many of them died in prison. Others were fined and banished from the land, not to settle down in the Puritan colonies, but to work as slaves in plantations. Yet in spite of it all Nonconformity continued to increase. The full and careful study by Professor Lyon Turner of the Episcopal returns and Licenses under Indulgence shows this very clearly. It would appear that in some three thousand towns and villages in England and Wales were to be found Nonconformist teachers, preachers, meetings, or conventicles. In many places they are described as numerous, or very numerous, in others as few or inconsiderable, or mostly women, or even silly women.¹ Very generally they are characterized as mean people, inferior sort, sometimes as better sort, tradesmen and yeomen, and farmers, sometimes as gents, freeholders, or men of breeding. Though they are classified as Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists and Quakers, it is evident that with the exception of the last named, the classes can by no means be clearly distinguished. "Presbyterian" is frequently used quite loosely as a generic term for any people who were not Anglicans, while Baptists and Independents, then as now, were both Congregationalists. In Bedfordshire and Bucks many Baptists followed the example of

¹ Probably meaning merely "simple".

John Bunyan and described themselves in public documents as Independents.¹ The very large number of existing Independent and Baptist Churches that date their foundation from this period provide another indication of the firm hold which Nonconformity had of the middle and lower classes, and of the fact that it was fostered and strengthened rather than damped by persecution. It must be recognized also that the persecution was not always as rigorous as Parliament intended it to be. It was bad enough in all conscience and caused an immense amount of very real suffering, but there were some mitigations. It was known, for example, that the King was secretly disposed towards indulgence, not from any love of Nonconformists, but because whatever hit them hit also the Roman Catholics, whom he was anxious to befriend. Then, again, in certain parts of the country public opinion was by no means hostile, and the authorities were inclined to wink at breaches of the law. Public events, too, played into the hands of the Dissenters. During the great plague in London and the subsequent fire, when most of the clergy fled into the country, Nonconformist Ministers stayed behind and took their places, ministering to the people in their sore need. But it was the Dutch war and the unpopularity which it brought to the King and his advisers which helped the Nonconformists most. It led directly to a new Declaration of Indulgence, which, first informally and later under sanction of Parliament, practically suspended the Act of Uniformity, and under which Nonconformists enjoyed a certain amount of freedom until the passing of the Toleration Act in 1689.

¹ Cf. *Original Records of Early Nonconformity, under Persecution and Indulgence*, by G. Lyon Turner.

Both before and during the period of Indulgence more than one attempt was made to comprehend both Independents and Presbyterians within the National Church. The discussions and negotiations which took place are again very interesting in the light of the reunion conferences of modern times. The moving spirit in the matter was Richard Baxter. He had some encouragement from the Government and from certain of the Bishops who were more hostile to Rome than they were to Dissent, and who were concerned at all costs to serve the Protestant interest. Baxter himself seems to have believed that in Presbyterianism might be found the *via media* between the extremes of Prelacy and Independency. He had no love for either, but when the proposals for a Church comprehensive enough to include both fell to the ground, he turned his attention to a scheme for uniting Presbyterians and Independents. This led him into direct controversy with John Owen, who, over against Baxter's view of the Church, strongly asserted that Churches do not possess the power of the keys in their own right, and that Ministers do not derive their authority to preach and govern from the Churches but from Jesus Christ Himself, the head of the Church. It must be confessed, however, that as time went on Baxter came to have a more tolerant and sympathetic view of the Independent position. This is clearly shown in the following remarkable passage from his autobiography: "For the Independents, I saw that most of them were zealous and very many learned, discreet and godly men and fit to be very serviceable in the Church. And I found in the search of Scripture and Antiquity that in the beginning a *governed Church* and a *stated worshipping Church* were all one and not

two several things, and that they were societies of Christians united for personal communion: and not only communion by meetings of officers and delegates in Synods as many Churches in Association be. And I saw if once we go beyond the bounds of *Personal Communion*, as the end of particular Churches in the Definition, we may make a Church of a nation, or of ten nations or of what we please, which shall have none of the natural ends of the Primitive particular Churches. Also I saw a commendable care of *Serious Holiness* and *Discipline* in most of the Independent Churches." If these opinions were at all common among Presbyterians of Baxter's time, the fact would account for the readiness with which many of them became Independents later on. In spite of Baxter's efforts, however, the Independents were in no mood to accept even a revised Prayer Book, or to join a Church which remained under strict Episcopal government. Then, as now, the question of reordination was a stumbling-block which could not be got over.

When James II came to the throne he at once showed himself favourable to religious liberty. His first act was to release all who were in prison for conscience' sake, and by this means some fifteen hundred Quakers, among others, were set at liberty. In reply to a deputation sent to thank him for his clemency the King said: "Some of you know, I am sure you do Mr. Penn, that it was always my principle that conscience ought not to be forced, and that all men ought to have liberty of their consciences, and that I have promised in my declaration I will continue to perform as long as I live, and I hope, before I die, to settle it so that after ages shall have no reason to alter it." These were noble

words, but it is sad to reflect that they were in advance of their time. There is no reason to think that the King was insincere, or that he was only seeking an advantage for Roman Catholics. The fact was that at this time neither Independents nor Presbyterians were prepared to grant the liberty of conscience they claimed for themselves either to Quakers or Roman Catholics. In this respect the Baptists stand out as being more liberal than any of their Dissenting brethren. The tolerant spirit of the King was really his undoing, for it united both Episcopalians and Nonconformists against him.

It must be mentioned, too, that the policy of persecution, ruthlessly carried out in the earlier years of his reign, had done nothing to give Nonconformists any confidence in the King. If he had released from prison some fifteen hundred Quakers, probably in the belief that they were harmless, he had imprisoned many Nonconformists, including the aged Richard Baxter, on the flimsiest charges. He allowed the abortive rebellion of Monmouth to inflame him against all Protestants, and supported the notorious Judge Jeffreys in the cruelties of his Bloody Assize. Jeffreys was responsible for the execution of over three hundred persons, some of whom were women and others children scarcely out of their teens, while some eight hundred others were sold into slavery in the West Indies. For the time Nonconformity was again driven underground. Informers were everywhere and meetings could only be held in secret and under the gravest risks. Once more, however, it became evident that persecution could do nothing to break the spirit of Nonconformists. The country was still Protestant, and had been deeply roused

by the treatment of the Huguenots in France and by the evident intention of the King to appoint Roman Catholics to positions of influence in the army, the Church, and the State. Finding that Parliament would not support him, James attempted to govern without one. He pressed his claims as head of the Church to the point of practically repealing the Test Act, and appointing Roman Catholics to the Privy Council, to livings in the Church, and even to the Deanery of Christ Church. He also revived the Court of High Commission and made everything ready for a renewed policy of repression and persecution. But he had still to reckon with the Nonconformists who were by no means inclined to adopt the Anglican attitude of passive obedience. He therefore sought to buy them off by a policy of Indulgence, promising them full liberty of worship and some relief from their disabilities if they would support the Crown against the Established Church. Some few of them acquiesced, but the great majority, including leaders like Baxter, Howe and Bunyan, would have nothing to say to a policy that was really anti-Protestant and based on recognition of the dispensing power of the King. James, however, persisted and issued another Declaration of Indulgence which he ordered to be read from the pulpits of all the Churches. The Archbishop of Canterbury and six other bishops refused to read the declaration and memorialized the King against it. For their pains they were sent to the Tower, where Nonconformist Ministers visited them and encouraged them in their resistance. They told the King plainly when he charged them with complicity in rebellion, that they would always stand by those who supported the Protestant cause. The Bishops were

tried and ultimately acquitted amid universal demonstrations of joy, and the gratitude of the Anglican Church was such that Archbishop Sancroft, who had certainly been no friend to Nonconformity, issued a pastoral letter in which he enjoined on his Bishops and clergy "to have a very tender regard to their brethren, the Protestant Dissenters, to visit them often, to entertain them hospitably, to discourse with them civilly, to persuade them, if it might be, to conform to the Church, but if that were found impossible to join them heartily and affectionately in exertions for the blessed cause of the Reformation". It is a pity that this spirit did not last, but the whole episode shows that the Nonconformists generally were ready to put aside their own interests, when the liberties of the country and the cause of Protestantism were at stake. As Macaulay says, "At this conjuncture the Protestant Dissenters of London won for themselves a title to the lasting gratitude of their country." For the moment there was a truce between the rival sections of the Protestant Church, and the alliance between Anglicans and Nonconformists lasted long enough to overthrow James and accomplish the bloodless revolution which set William and Mary on the throne of England.

The revolution improved the prospects and greatly raised the hopes of English Nonconformists. The new King was known to be a lover of religious liberty. He was, too, a devout Calvinist with an hereditary distrust of Roman Catholicism, and "never of that mind that violence was suited to the advancing of true religion". He also believed that a man's religious opinions should not debar him from service to the State. In all this he was in advance of his time, and he had to proceed with

the greatest caution. The first attempts at a religious settlement in his reign took the form of comprehension, a modification of the constitution of the Church so as to include Dissenters. Subscription to the articles was no longer to be necessary, but Ministers were asked to declare a general consent to "the doctrine, worship and government of the Church" and to give a promise to preach and act accordingly. Episcopal ordination by laying on of hands was still insisted on, but with the use of a formula which implied that ordination meant giving authority to minister in the Church of England without denying the reality of the previous ministry. Presbyterians generally were greatly enamoured of comprehension on these terms and bitterly disappointed when the proposals came to nothing. Even some Independents were willing to accept such a way of peace, though others of them looked askance upon the whole thing. A compromise was found by substituting toleration for comprehension. A Toleration Act was passed in 1689 and henceforth Dissent was at least legally recognized. The Act represented the bare minimum of concession. Dissenters were allowed to exist on terms of making a bargain with the State by which certain laws against them were suspended under conditions. The Act declared that the worship of God under other forms than those of the Church of England was no longer a punishable offence. Nonconformist Ministers were still required to subscribe to the articles with the exception of those concerning the traditions of the Church, the Homilies and the consecration of Bishops and ministers, and in the case of Baptists, that concerning infant Baptism. Their chapels were to be licensed for worship by a Bishop, Archbishop or Justice

of the Peace. Quakers were allowed to make a declaration instead of taking an oath provided they at the same time professed their faith in the Trinity and in the inspiration of Scripture. If any of these conditions were disregarded, Nonconformity became again a punishable crime. All this was, of course, very far from a real assertion of religious liberty. Yet the Toleration Act marks a turning of the ways, and put the Nonconformist Churches on an entirely new footing. Active persecution was now at an end and Nonconformists could feel that they had at least a right to exist. They still laboured under many disabilities it is true, but they had a new opportunity and they were not slow to use it. Their struggle for freedom now began to take a new form, and we shall see how one by one the shackles which still bound them were shaken off and how they gradually emerged into the full liberty which they enjoy to-day.

This new condition of things profoundly affected Congregationalism. Its adherents had been in the forefront of the battle for the right to exist. With many of them, indeed, toleration had become an end in itself. They had almost succumbed to the temptation *propter vitam vitai perdere causas*. In any case, the victory of freedom was far from complete, for neither Roman Catholics nor Unitarians were included in it. In tacitly consenting to their exclusion the Independents were so far false to their own fundamental principles. Further, there is no doubt that their long struggle for toleration served to modify their position in other ways. The stress they laid on freedom led them to identify their cause with that of freedom on the wider or political scale. From this time dates the assumption that

Congregationalism stands for democracy in religion or in the Church. The essence of their position is, as we have already seen, that the Church is a body of men and women consecrated to the service of Christ through whom His will becomes manifest and by whom He works. This carries with it, no doubt, the right of each member of the Church to give expression by voice and vote to what he believes to be the will of Christ ; in other words, to the democratic method applied in Church affairs. But it was an unfortunate change of emphasis which led to insistence on the right of self-government as the essential thing in Congregational Church order. It involved a stressing of mere machinery which inevitably lowered the spiritual standard and conception of the Church, and seemed to justify an ecclesiastical alliance with those secular forces which had as their object the maintenance of the democratic ideal. When Congregationalists themselves were ready to accept this position, it was not surprising that outsiders should have fastened upon it as their outstanding characteristic.

CHAPTER IX

THE NEMESIS OF TOLERATION

WITH the passing of the Toleration Act there began a period of religious decline which lasted until the evangelical revival. The first effect of the Act, naturally enough, was to give to Nonconformity a new lease of life. Large numbers of new chapels of all denominations were built up and down the country, and for the first time Dissenters felt free to organize themselves on lines which have lasted until the present day. They still laboured under grave disabilities, and for the removal of these they continued to fight tenaciously enough. But the venue of the struggle was changed, and there is no doubt that, as they were driven to become more political in their attitude, they tended to become less religious. The process was one of slow and almost unconscious development. At first they made the most of their new-found freedom and were filled with hope for the future.

The immediate effect of the Toleration Act was to revive the desire for a closer union between Congregationalists and Presbyterians, perhaps, in itself, an indication that neither party was as sure of, or secure in, its position as it might have been. The leader among the Congregationalists was Matthew Mead, of Stepney, an old Cromwellian Independent, but a man of gentle spirit and moderate opinions who saw good in everyone

and was by temperament a mediator. He was aided by Isaac Chauncey, John Owen's successor at Mark Lane, by Increase Mather, of Boston, who happened to be in England at this time, and by John Howe, the life-long friend of Mead, now more closely associated with Presbyterianism. On the other side were Baxter, Bates, Annesley, Sylvester, and Daniel Williams. These men produced a scheme for the formation of a new Church under the name of United Brethren, which should retain and combine what was distinctive both in Congregationalism and Presbyterianism. They agreed at the outset on the fundamental Congregational principle that the sole qualification for Church membership should be personal faith in Jesus Christ, and that companies of men and women so qualified and statedly meeting together for "ordinary communion with one another in all the ordinances of Church" are Churches in the full sense of the term. Such Churches are to be autonomous and free to choose their own Pastors and Elders, though it is "ordinarily requisite" that in so grave a matter they should consult the Pastors of neighbouring Churches, who should also take part in the ordination of Pastors so chosen. Further, while it is explicitly laid down that no Church shall have any power or authority over any other Church or Churches, it is also provided that the Ministers of the Churches shall form a consultative body to be referred to in weighty and difficult cases, and whose judgments shall not be disregarded "without apparent grounds from the Word of God". In doctrinal matters it is provided "That a Church acknowledge the Scriptures to be the word of God, the perfect and only rule of faith and practice; and own either the doctrinal part of those commonly

called the Articles of the Church of England, or the Confession or Catechisms, Shorter or Larger, compiled by the Assembly at Westminster or the Confession agreed on at the Savoy, to be agreeable to the said rule".¹

This agreement has more than a merely antiquarian interest. It foreshadows certain modern developments in Congregationalism and it helps to explain much in the future relations between Independents and Presbyterians.² Though it came to nothing in the end, it was at first warmly welcomed not only in London but in several parts of the country, where annual meetings of the two denominations, begun then, long survived. At the same time, the fact that Ministers on both sides should have been so ready to sacrifice some of their distinctive principles, argues not merely a strong and genuine desire for unity, but a certain weakness of conviction which often marked the attitude of Nonconformists at this period in their history. This is also indicated by the purely ministerial character of the movement, and by the readiness with which congregations accepted it. There was, however, a good deal of hesitation on the part of some Congregational Ministers, and controversies on points of order and doctrine soon arose which revealed fundamental differences and practically nullified the Agreement.

The first of these had to do with a Congregational Minister of Rothwell, Northants, the Rev. Richard Davis. A stern and unbending Calvinist, he was also an earnest, evangelical preacher. He made many con-

¹ Cf. *The Heads of Agreement assented to by the United Ministers in and about London formerly called Presbyterian and Congregational*, 1691. Reprinted in the *Congregational Magazine*, 1843.

² Cf. Alex. Gordon's *Freedom after Ejection*, which deals with the relations between the two bodies.

verts and allowed them to form Churches and appoint Pastors from among themselves, whether or no they obtained the sanction of neighbouring Churches or Ministers. This was reported to London, and the city Ministers, meeting as a synod, passed judgment on Davis and virtually cast him out. Their action was widely repudiated, and Davis himself refused to be bound by it. He defended his position and asserted his Independency in a book *Truth and Innocency Vindicated* (1692). The extreme type of Antinomian Calvinism there set forth was acceptable to many Congregationalists, and they were therefore the less ready to submit to the judgment passed on Davis by a body of whose authority they were more than suspicious.

Another and more serious cause of dissension arose over the posthumous works of Dr. Crisp, an Antinomian divine of the Commonwealth days. His son, wishing to republish his father's work with some hitherto unpublished additions, asked a number of London Ministers to sign a preface guaranteeing the genuineness of the work. This was taken to mean approval of Dr. Crisp's theology and led to a rather bitter controversy. Crisp's extreme Calvinism was anathema to the Presbyterians, and when Dr. Daniel Williams formally refuted his doctrines in a book entitled *Gospel Truth Stated and Vindicated*, his work was endorsed and recommended by Bates, Howe and a large number of other Ministers. No Congregationalist would join them, and it soon became evident that the doctrinal cleavage was complete. In vain did Howe and the United Brethren pour oil on the troubled waters. Congregationalists denounced Presbyterians as Arminian and Socinian in their leanings, while Presbyterians accused Congregationalists of sheer

Antinomianism. An open rupture between the two denominations appeared inevitable, and although peace was ultimately re-established, there was no more talk of organic union.

During the whole of William's reign Nonconformists were in favour with the authorities and their cause flourished. It is estimated that they built some thousand or twelve hundred new meeting-houses. These were generally vested in Trustees for the worship of God "according to the custom of the people called Independents", or in some cases for the use of a congregation called Presbyterian or Congregational. The Churches generally were small in numbers compared with those of to-day, and consisted mainly of people of the upper and lower middle class, though in London some members of the aristocracy were found in them. The services were held in the morning and afternoon with a Communion service about once a month. The "diet of worship" generally consisted of a long extempore prayer, reading of the Scripture, a massive doctrinal sermon, and the singing of psalms either in the Scottish version or that of Tate and Brady. In 1707 Watts' hymns began to come into vogue. As Dr. Dale says: "Watts redeemed the psalmody of Congregationalists from Judaism and made it Christian. It was a revolution the greatness of which cannot be measured." In polity, as we have seen already, Congregationalists clung to the New Testament model but with a more definitely ecclesiastical bias. The old conception of the Church as a spiritual body gave place to the idea of a democratic society. Ministers and deacons were regarded as governing the Church with its consent, and any right of the Church to act apart from its officers was hardly contemplated.

The gradual cessation of persecution brought with it a spirit of moderation and compromise that was unfavourable to enthusiasm, and tended to relax both the moral fibre and religious earnestness of the people. Nevertheless there can be no doubt that these Churches played a great part in educating men and women in habits of independent thinking and action, and this was not without its effect in the social and political life of the time. Theologically the Churches sympathized with the more extreme forms of Calvinism, and their rigidly doctrinaire attitude accounts for the lack of life and power which characterized them throughout the eighteenth century.

The accession of Queen Anne with her High Church proclivities and hatred of Whigs caused for a time a strong reaction against Nonconformity. The first effect of this was seen in the prolonged struggle over occasional Conformity. It had long been the practice for Dissenters who held any office under the Crown or under a municipal corporation to attend Communion occasionally in the Anglican Church as a condition of retaining such office. This was winked at by Presbyterians and some Congregationalists, though Baptists and Quakers held aloof from it. Moderate Churchmen approved it, and Bishop Burnet wrote: "I think the practice of occasional conformity, as used by Dissenters, is so far from deserving the title of a vile hypocrisy, that it is the duty of all moderate Dissenters, on their own principles to do it." High Churchmen, however, thought otherwise. To them it was something like sacrilege, and they denounced it in the bitterest terms. In doing so they found a curious advocate in Daniel Defoe. When Sir Humphrey Edwin, a leading Congregationalist who was

Lord Mayor of London, went in state to a Congregationalist meeting-house, Defoe wrote a pamphlet entitled, *An Enquiry into the occasional conformity of Dissenters in cases of Preferment: with a Preface to the Lord Mayor occasioned by his carrying the sword to a Conventicle* (1697). When Sir Thomas Abney was Lord Mayor in 1701, he, too, was known to have taken Communion in an Anglican Church prior to his election. Defoe then republished his pamphlet with a new preface in which he challenged Howe, who was Sir T. Abney's minister, to say whether he approved of thus "playing bo-peep with God". Howe refused to be drawn, but evidently approved of occasional conformity, though repudiating the suggestion that it was practised simply with a view to preferment. The result of the controversy was the introduction of a Bill providing for the disfranchisement of such Dissenters as practised occasional conformity. It was carried by a large majority in the Commons but twice thrown out by the Lords and did not become law till some time afterwards. Meanwhile public opinion against Dissent was greatly stirred by the writings and sermons of the notorious Dr. Sacheverell, who became for a time a public hero. Bishop Burnet characterized him as "a bold, insolent man, with a very small measure of religion, virtue, learning or good sense; but he resolved to force himself into popularity and preferment, by the most petulant railings at dissenters and low churchmen in several sermons and libels wrote without either chasteness of style or liveliness of expression; all was one unpractised strain of indecent and scurrilous language".¹ It was attacks like these which prompted Defoe to write his *Shortest Way with*

¹ Burnet, *History of our Times*, iv, p. 108.

Dissenters. Intended as a satire on the bitterness of the controversy, it was so cleverly done as to deceive both parties. Poor Defoe fell between two stools. The High Churchmen were furious when they discovered the deception, and the Nonconformists were offended at his daring to defend their cause with so double-edged a weapon. The pamphlet was publicly burnt by order of Parliament, and Defoe himself pilloried, fined and imprisoned. Sacheverell also was brought to trial, mainly because he had attacked the authors of the revolution and stigmatized as traitors some of the Queen's Ministers who had supported toleration. He was suspended from his clerical duties for three years, and two of his most offensive sermons were burnt by the common hangman. His trial caused intense excitement and gave rise to riots in which some meeting-houses were wrecked, and his light sentence was regarded as a triumph for the Church and Crown. In the end the Queen appointed him to a good living in London. The whole incident is curious and significant not merely as showing the bitterness of extreme Anglicans against Dissent but because it witnesses to the strong position to which Dissent had at this time attained. It was important enough to unite some very powerful forces against it and to lend colour to the cry that it endangered the very existence of the Anglican Church. Its immunity, such as it was, however, was short-lived. In 1711 the occasional Conformity Bill was brought in again and easily passed. As the result of it all Nonconformist Mayors, Aldermen, Councillors, and Justices of the Peace were compelled either to resign their offices or abstain from attending Nonconformist places of worship. Most of them chose the latter course on the ground that

their resignation might endanger the succession of the House of Hanover. They contented themselves with holding services in their own houses.

But worse was in store for them yet. The chief disability from which Nonconformists suffered and continued to suffer for many years was their exclusion from the National Universities. With splendid energy and persistence they had set up an educational system of their own and had founded academies or schools of university standard in many parts of the country. In spite of the cruel disadvantages under which they laboured, these schools had flourished and were attended even by sons of the nobility and gentry who had no leanings towards Dissent. They were regarded with the utmost aversion by Churchmen generally as a danger both to religion and the Church. South, preaching in 1685, had urged his hearers "to employ the utmost of your power and interest both with the King and Parliament to suppress, utterly to suppress and extinguish, those private blind conventicling schools or academies of grammar and philosophy set up and taught secretly by fanatics here and there all the Kingdom over". And Sacheverell, preaching before the Lord Mayor in 1709, had stigmatized them as a peril to the nation, saying that "Atheism, Deism, Tritheism, Socinianism with all the hellish principles of Fanaticism, Regicide, and Anarchy were taught in them". It was therefore against the academies that the next attack was directed.¹ It was thought that once the academies were suppressed the Nonconformists would no longer

¹ An excellent account of these academies is to be found in a monograph entitled, *Dissenting Academies*, by Miss Irene Parker (Mrs. Parker Crane). Cambridge University Press.

by able to educate their Ministers and the sons of their leading laymen, that these would cease to attend conventicles, and that Dissent would then be left to the poor and ignorant and no longer be a rival to the Church. A Bill was therefore introduced "To prevent the growth of Schism and for the further security of the Church of England as by Law established". It provided that no person should teach or instruct youth without a licence from an Archbishop or Bishop and a declaration of conformity to the Church of England. Failure to conform was to be visited with imprisonment and deprivation of all right to teach. The Act was to come into force on August 1st, 1714, but on that very day Queen Anne died and the situation for the time being was saved. The Schism Act, as it was commonly called, though on the Statute Book, was never enforced.

The loyalty of the Dissenters to the House of Hanover proved at once a bane and a blessing. It increased the enmity of the High Church party, who saw in the Nonconformists the greatest obstacle to their Jacobite intrigues and to the restoration of the Stuarts. They had therefore a genuine political interest in seeking to compass their destruction. But, as these schemes failed, this same loyalty stood the Nonconformists in good stead and brought them many helpers in the long struggle for religious liberty which engaged all their energies from this time onward. In spite of the warnings of Defoe, who was always a friend to their cause, though one whom they never really trusted, they persisted in looking to politicians for help in securing their liberties. The reproach of political dissent was one which they came to deserve or rather was forced upon them by the exigencies of the time. The struggles on which they

now entered coloured their history and their witness for several generations. In these struggles, as we shall see, Congregationalists played a very conspicuous part.

In order to carry out this work Nonconformists found it necessary to organize themselves somewhat more closely than heretofore. Early in the eighteenth century the Ministers of the three denominations—Baptist, Independent and Presbyterian—living in and around London, formed themselves into three Boards for the purpose of promoting their several interests. Occasionally they found it desirable to unite for certain public purposes, and in 1727 they formally constituted the "General Body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers of the three Denominations residing in and about the cities of London and Westminster". This body is still in existence, and still retains the privilege then granted to it of personal access to the Crown. In 1732 another similar Body called the Dissenting Deputies was set up, consisting of two delegates from every congregation of the three Denominations within ten miles of London. The Deputies had as their special task "to take care of the civil affairs of the Dissenters," and for many years they rendered yeoman service in this direction. It is interesting to note that in this period, while some 60 per cent. of the Presbyterians had become Unitarian along with a small percentage of Baptists, there were no Unitarians among the Congregationalists. In the end the Unitarians seceded from both bodies and formed an organization of their own. They have always been foremost in serving the interests of religious liberty and education. With the grounds of their secession and its consequences we shall deal later.

It is not easy to summarize the effect of the struggles

of this period on the life and character of the Congregational Churches. On the whole it must be said to have been unfavourable. The decay of Presbyterianism meant the decline of a more spacious Puritan spirit in favour of a narrower Separatism. Theologically Congregationalists were strongly Calvinistic and orthodox, while ecclesiastically they tended to confine their interest to the small circle of their own members. Both Richard Baxter and, in later years, John Wesley animadverted on this tendency, and there were certainly good grounds for their criticism. When Dr. Watts wrote :

We are a garden walled around,
Chosen and made peculiar ground ;
A little spot enclosed by grace
Out of the world's wide wilderness.

he was certainly giving expression to a sentiment and a sense of privilege which the Congregationalists of his day would have unanimously endorsed. The Separatist spirit was strongly marked, and the disabilities under which they suffered served only to enhance it. Occupied as they were with the defence of their own position and the maintenance of their liberties, they had little leisure and less inclination to concern themselves with the religious interests of the people at large. The spiritual decline which all the Churches suffered in the eighteenth century had many causes, but not the least among them was the preoccupation of Churches with their own concerns. A Christianity which ceases to be aggressive and evangelistic soon ceases to live, and no clearer illustration of this law is to be found than among the Dissenters of this period. There is, however, another

side to the picture. Even in these narrow Congregational circles the spark of true religion and sound morality was kept alive. Evidence of this may be found in the life and teaching of such a man as Philip Doddridge of Northampton. He began life as a country Pastor at Kibworth, in Leicestershire, and later on at Northampton gathered round him a body of students whom he greatly influenced, and many of whom entered the ministry. As a preacher he became known for the winning power of his message. He was genuinely evangelical and by no means strict in his Calvinistic orthodoxy. His book on the *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* became almost a classic, and won for him disciples far and wide. Northampton still cherishes his memory, and the old chapel which goes by his name has turned its vestry into a museum of personal relics of the man which are preserved with pious care. And Doddridge was not alone. Other and lesser men in towns and villages maintained the same witness and helped to leaven English life with a strain of austere piety, which helped to preserve the middle classes from the moral dangers which surrounded them. But as they were cut off from the main stream of the national life and driven in upon themselves, the religion of these Congregationalists tended to be narrow in its outlook and cramping in its effect. As Dr. Mackennal says of them, "They simply gave themselves to make the best for God they could of their sunless lives. Their Church was the only sphere to which they could give their practical energies when the daily work for daily bread was ended; and they watched its purity, its doctrinal soundness, its zeal for truth, and its devotional temper with a jealousy that was not always wise. The members scrutinized each

other's conduct, harassed their children with premature anxieties, became formal in speech and habit. Their younger men became doctrinaire and controversial, catching at every phantom of free thought, imbibing the social and political doctrines which were preparing for the French Revolution . . . These are the dangers which are inherent in Separatism. In a narrow sphere Independency is not always lovely. Church discipline tends to become vexatious, pragmatic: the meddling man is able to make too much of himself: enlarge the range of practical thought and effort, and Congregationalism is a generous Church system, as broad as it is lofty." ¹

¹ *The Evolution of Congregationalism*, pp. 150, 151

CHAPTER X

REACTION AND REVIVAL

IN the early years of the eighteenth century Congregationalists were occupied with fighting both internal and external foes. Much of the strength they needed in their fight for religious freedom they tended to dissipate in theological controversy. The Jacobite disturbances which marked the early years of the Georges showed the Dissenters generally to be thoroughly loyal to the House of Hanover, and they suffered for their loyalty. In those parts of the country where the Pretender had any support his followers found the burning of meeting-houses an easy and popular way of expressing their sentiments. But there is little gratitude in politics. The first attempts to secure some reward for their loyalty were strongly opposed and met with only partial success. In 1718 a Bill was introduced for "strengthening the Protestant interest". It provided for the repeal of the Occasional Conformity Act, the Schism Act and the Test and Corporation Acts. In spite of the declaration of the Archbishop of Canterbury that these Acts were "the main bulwark and supporters of the Established Church," the Bill was supported by several Bishops, but only carried after the clauses relating to the Test and Corporation Acts had been dropped out. After the accession of George II in 1727 the first of the Annual Indemnity Acts was passed in order to relieve

Dissenters from the penalties attaching to violation of the Corporation and Test Acts. The relief, however, was very partial, and only extended to those who through ignorance or inadvertence had failed to qualify for their office. It took no account of conscientious objection, and was merely retrospective. The disqualification remained for all future aspirants for office. The new King, however, was fully in favour of more liberal measures. When in 1733 an ecclesiastical prosecution was set on foot against Doddridge for keeping an Academy at Northampton, it was stopped on the intervention of the Crown. The King is then said to have declared that he would have no persecution for religious opinions during his reign. This encouraged the newly-formed Dissenting deputies again to take up the question of repealing the obnoxious Acts. Their efforts came to nothing, however, partly because of the opposition of the Anglican authorities, and partly through the indifference of the powerful Minister, Sir Robert Walpole, who, though he was anxious not to lose the support of the Dissenters, was still more anxious not to antagonize the Church.

There is no doubt, too, that a further cause of the weakness of Dissent at this time is to be found in what was known as the *regium donum*. This was an annual gift of £500 from the royal purse for the relief of poor Protestant Dissenting Ministers. There was some precedent for it in the pensions given by Charles II to some ejected Presbyterian Ministers, and in the same monarch's gift of £1,000 to John Owen for distribution among the Nonconformist poor. In 1721, also, Calamy dedicated a volume of sermons to George I and received in return a personal gift of £50 and a sum of £500 for

the widows of Ministers. In return for this bounty the King hoped that Dissenters would use their influence to return only such members of Parliament as would be " hearty for himself and his family ". When, therefore, the proposal was made for a regular gift from the Crown for the relief of Dissenters, Walpole welcomed it as a means of keeping their importunity within bounds. It no doubt had that effect with many, especially among the Presbyterians. Calamy, for example, argued that as Dissenters were excluded from the emoluments of the National Church there was no reason why they should not receive something from the Crown to make up their loss. The whole business of the *regium donum* is a sordid and miserable one, and must be counted one among the causes of that lukewarmness which now characterized the spirit of Nonconformity.

At this time, too, the Dissenting interest was further weakened by theological controversy. None of the Churches quite escaped the influence of the prevailing Deism. In most of them there was more theology than religion, and the struggle between orthodoxy and rationalism became acute. So far as Congregationalists are concerned, matters came to a head in the Salter's Hall Controversy in 1719, the issue of which profoundly affected both the doctrines and fortunes of Congregationalism. The immediate cause of the trouble was the condemnation of three Presbyterian Ministers at Exeter for holding and teaching Arian views. Their case was referred to the Assembly of the three Denominations in London meeting at Salter's Hall. After long discussions it became evident that the Assembly was sharply divided. So far from being able to send advice to Exeter it could not itself formulate any agreed

opinion on the fundamental questions involved. A motion to the effect that those present should declare their faith in the doctrine of the Trinity and in the Deity of Christ in the terms of the first of the Thirty-nine Articles and the fifth and sixth questions of the Westminster Catechism, split the Assembly into two nearly equal parties of subscribers and non-subscribers. In view of their later attitude towards creeds it is interesting to note that the Congregationalists were mostly subscribers, being strongly opposed to Unitarianism in any form. The Presbyterians were on the other side, and objected to making human creeds a test of faith quite in the traditional manner of the Independents. Many of the general Baptists were with them, and both they and the Presbyterian Churches became deeply tainted with Socinian views. The result was that from this time forward Presbyterianism greatly declined. Some of their Churches became Unitarian, while those that remained orthodox were compelled to go to Independent Academies for their Ministers, and so gradually drifted into Independency. Not a few of the non-subscribing ministers ultimately became Anglicans, though it is difficult to justify the consistency of those who, while objecting to one article, were afterwards ready to accept the whole thirty-nine. Dr. Dale comments on the situation as follows : " The great majority both of the Congregational Ministers and of the Congregational Churches held fast to the Trinitarian faith. The principal cause of the difference between the fortunes of the two denominations lies in their polity. The Presbyterians trusted the management of their affairs to persons for whose religious life there was no guarantee—to trustees, subscribers or seat-holders :

among the Independents the Church consisting of those who had declared their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and who had been received into communion on giving evidence that their faith was a real spiritual force and not a mere tradition, elected, and in extreme cases, dismissed the Pastor. Evangelical doctrine in the preaching of the Minister was secured by the presence of evangelical life in the people." ¹

Under these circumstances, therefore, it is not surprising that the problem of the "decay of the Dissenting interest" now began to occupy the minds of thoughtful observers. In 1730 an anonymous pamphlet was published entitled *An Enquiry into the causes of the decay of the Dissenting interest in a letter to a Dissenting Minister*. Its author was one Strickland Gough, a man who had been trained in one of the Academies and afterwards became an Anglican. His diagnosis of the situation contains a good deal that is quite interestingly modern and, in addition to the grounds of failure which he recognizes, unconsciously, betrays the existence of others. Gough charges Dissenters with ignorance of their own principles, and bad management of their affairs. He describes their fundamental principle as "a liberty for every man to form his own sentiments, and to pursue them by all lawful and regular methods; to disclaim the impositions of men, and to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience". Apparently the sole reason for the existence of Dissent was that it offered greater freedom and variety of worship than could be found in the Established Church. Neither in Gough's indictment nor in the replies which it called forth is there any real appreciation of those spiritual

¹ *History of English Congregationalism*, p. 542.

values which early Nonconformity sought to conserve. On the more practical side Gough complains that the liberty for which Dissenters stand is not conceded to their Ministers. Congregations are jealous of heresy and do not like plain speaking in the pulpit. Young preachers are discouraged from thinking for themselves. Congregations choose Ministers for the wrong reasons. They like oddity and eloquence rather than good taste and culture, so that "people of wit and politeness grow ashamed of them and choose a more graceful way of religion". Further, Ministers are badly paid, and therefore the best of them tend to be drawn away to the Church and only "low" men are left. More attention, therefore, should be paid to the education of Ministers, and young men admitted to the Academies "should be creditable and promising, chosen either out of the families of Gentlemen or else upon the account of a very extraordinary genius". After some very sensible remarks about the curriculum, Gough adds: "It may seem odd and whimsical to propose a dancing master for one tutor at an Academy, but if something equivalent to it was contrived to give them a gracefulness and gentility of address, and prune off all clumsiness and awkwardness that is disagreeable to people of fashion, and which gives learning the air of pedantry, it would do them the most eminent service." The melancholy thing about all this is that it was generally recognized as a true statement of the case and as representing a widespread public opinion. It called forth serious and considered replies. Among Congregationalists Watts, Doddridge, and Abraham Taylor responded to the challenge. They all agree that the decay is not so much numerical as in spirit, temper and zeal. They bring evidence to show

that if Dissent had declined in numbers in some places it had increased in others to an even greater extent. But they also agree that it had everywhere lost its old power and strictness. Taylor complains of the doctrinal decline. Preachers no longer deal with the great truths of religion, but "amuse" their congregations with "mere moral babble under the plausible name of practical preaching". They speak with very uncertain sound about the great doctrines of the Trinity, and the Divinity of Jesus Christ. Therefore men lose their zeal, drift into natural religion, and are content to worship God only once on the Sunday. Watts ascribes it all to the general decay of vital religion which affects all the Churches alike. But Dissenters have suffered more than others because their standard of Christian conduct and character was higher. Watts complains, too, that they are content with one diet of worship on Sunday; that they are shy of talking about religion, but by no means shy of talking scandal; that they neglect family prayer and the religious instruction of children and servants. Some of them even are given to public drinking and take part in worldly amusements such as were once banned. Among Congregationalists these downward tendencies were viewed with grave concern, and definite efforts were made to stem the tide. A number of devout laymen meeting in London formed themselves into a society for the defence of the faith, called the King's Head Society from the name of the tavern where they held meetings. At their instance the Lime Street Lecture was founded to give leading Ministers an opportunity to expound and defend the Calvinistic faith. Under the same auspices two new Academies were established—one in London and one in the West of England—for the

training of men for the ministry under orthodox tutors. Of these the former proved the ancestor of what is now known as New College, London, and the latter of the Western College, formerly of Plymouth and now of Bristol. In 1756 the Northern Education Society was formed in London for the purpose of dispelling the cloud of Socinian darkness which lay over many of the Churches in the North, and this Society was responsible for the Heckmondwike Academy and ultimately for the Heckmondwike Lecture. This curious institution is the outcome of a system of apologetic lectures then set up in some of the Northern towns in order to give instruction to the people in the Christian faith, and to defend it against Romish and Socinian errors.¹ The aim of these lectures was distinctly evangelical, and in order to reach non Church-going people they were often held in the evening. This was a great innovation at the time, but it proved successful and attractive. In course of time the afternoon service in most Congregational Churches was abandoned in favour of an evening service of a popular type.

By this time, too, the Congregational Churches, along with others, were beginning to feel the effects of the evangelical revival under Wesley and Whitefield. For some time they stood severely aloof and regarded the new movement with distaste if not with hostility. But they could not resist the tide of the Spirit, and it soon began to flow as strongly among them as among the newly-formed Methodist Churches. The spiritual revival meant a renewal of zeal for

¹ At the present time the Lecture consists of three services held in the three Congregational Churches of the town on three consecutive days.

religious liberty and of all the activities designed to promote it.

This is not the place to describe the work of John Wesley and his followers in any detail. We are concerned with it only in so far as it affected, and was affected by, Congregationalism. It should always be remembered that Methodism sprang from the same roots as early Congregationalism. The movement was not primarily an evangelistic one though it became almost exclusively so. Wesley and his Oxford friends, like Brown and Barrow long before them, were moved by a desire for personal holiness and for a Church fellowship based on spiritual affinity such as the Established religion could not provide. So, as Dr. Mackennal says, "The early Methodist societies were incipient Congregational Churches; the same craving for mutual edification, not as a pastoral function simply, but as a privilege and duty of each individual member appears in their 'method' and our 'discipline'." ¹ Reluctant though Wesley was to separate himself and his societies from the Church of England, he was driven into separation for reasons similar to those which moved the Separatists of an earlier day. Theologically there was, of course, a wide gulf between them. Wesley was an Arminian, but in Whitefield Congregationalists found a Calvinist after their own hearts. The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, for the foundation of which he was partly responsible, had from the first close relations with Congregationalism, and ultimately became almost absorbed in it. The spirit of Methodism, pietistic and evangelical, was always greater than the organization in which it found expression. It affected many in the Church of England, and created

¹ *The Evolution of Congregationalism*, p. 156.

that evangelical movement within the Church that became so powerful in the nineteenth century. It increased the number of Congregational Churches and leavened them all with a new spirit, which enabled them to slough off something of their exclusiveness and conceive their mission in broader and more truly Christian terms. It must be remembered that the Independents were a quiet, orderly, self-contained folk who believed in salvation by education, and regarded themselves as among the number of the elect. The fervour of Methodist preaching and its insistence on sudden conversion was strange and even abhorrent to them. They regarded Wesley and his followers as enemies of the doctrines of grace. Even Whitefield at first was under suspicion, and Doddridge got himself into serious trouble for allowing him to preach in his pulpit. In the end, however, the Independent Churches caught the contagion and at once began to take a new lease of life. Their Ministers preached with new fervour, they received large accessions from Methodist converts and from evangelical Anglicans who found the Established Church too strait for them. Their religious life became more intense and their spirit more evangelistic. Meeting-houses became crowded and had to be enlarged, and new ones sprang up in towns and villages all over the country. Many of the causes which were founded by Whitefield gradually became Congregationalist both in practice and polity.

Very slowly, too, but very surely, the revival produced a change in theology. The Independent Ministers still stood by the great Calvinistic doctrines of Original Sin, Election and the final Perseverance of the Saints ; but in preaching they were gradually modified if not alto-

gether abandoned. As Dr. Dale says, "The preachers who had caught the true spirit of the revival vehemently appealed to men to repent, and to trust for eternal salvation in the mercy of God revealed through Christ. They might hold fast to the creed that only the elect would really repent and appeal to the divine mercy; but they preached as if they thought that every man might repent and trust in Christ. They might be assured that, according to the eternal counsels of God; Christ died only for the elect; but they preached as if they thought that He died for every man in the congregation. At home in their study, they might be unable to resist the proof that when the evangelist John wrote that 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son', he really meant that 'God so loved the *Church*, that He gave His only begotten Son'; but in the pulpit they pleaded with men as if they believed that the text was true as it stood."¹ The change here indicated came about very gradually, but it was none the less real and effective. Independents began to describe themselves as Moderate Calvinists, and, though up to the middle of the nineteenth century many of them still used the Calvinistic forms of speech, their spirit became increasingly evangelical and their gospel one of free grace for all.

Along with this theological change there went an intensification of the change in temper and morale to which we have already drawn attention. The new preaching drew into Congregational Churches men and women who were Christians first and Congregationalists only by accident. Great care was taken to preserve the purity of membership, and only those were admitted to

¹ *History of English Congregationalism*, p. 587.

Church fellowship who gave satisfactory evidence of their conversion and Christian standing. Their Church fellowship became for them a means towards the better cultivation of the devout life and communion with Christ the head of the Church. They took their part in the ordering of the Church's life and were jealous of its autonomy. But the high doctrine of the Church which characterized primitive Independency was obscured if not altogether neglected. As Dr. Dale complains, it has hardly been recovered yet. Congregationalism came to stand for democracy in Church government rather than for a lofty spiritual conception of the Church as the body of Christ. At the same time it must be admitted that the Revival gave a new impetus to the life and activities of Congregational Churches. Preaching became less theological and more practical and popular, and Church members were filled with a new concern for the needs of the outside world. The "little garden walled around" theory gave place to a vision of the Church as the chosen means for establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. Prayer meetings became common, and every Congregational Church had its body of lay preachers, and steps were taken to train laymen for the work of itinerant evangelism. The founding of a society in London called the "Village Itinerancy or Evangelical Association for spreading the Gospel in England" was the beginning of what afterwards became known as Hackney College. About the same time new Academies were founded in Birmingham, Yorkshire and Manchester for the training of Congregational Pastors. Towards the end of the eighteenth century Robert Raikes began in Gloucester his magnificent work for Sunday Schools. Hitherto very little had

been done in Congregational Churches for the religious teaching of children in general. The children of Church members were supposed to be trained by their parents, and in the old days Sunday evening had been the set time for that purpose. But one of the first effects of the Revival was to produce a concern for those outside the Church, children as well as adults. Already here and there Churches had paid small sums to godly men and women for teaching children on Sundays and sometimes even, it is said, been at the cost of bribing the children to come and be taught. The example of Raikes, therefore, fell like seed on good ground. Volunteers were easily forthcoming, and the Sunday afternoon teaching of children became an established feature in every Congregational Church. In the then educational destitution the teaching was necessarily of a very rudimentary character. Reading and writing had often to be taught before anything else could be done. But the work went on and prospered, and the experience gained by it stood Dissenters in good stead when they came later on to deal with the question of elementary education on a national scale.

In 1795 Congregationalists took a great step forward in the founding of the London Missionary Society. The initiative came from Dr. Bogue, of Gosport, and the Warwickshire Association of Congregational Churches. But though started by Congregationalists, and mainly supported by them all through its history, the Society was from the first interdenominational, having for its object "not to send Presbyterianism, Independency, Episcopacy or any other form of Church order and government (about which there may be differences of opinion among serious persons) but the glorious gospel of the blessed

God to the heathen". The enterprise was at first viewed with a good deal of misgiving by the older Independents, but it gradually won its way and had the effect of creating a sense of common responsibility among the Congregational Churches and keeping alive the fires of their evangelistic zeal. Nor was this zeal confined to projects for the conversion of the heathen in distant lands. The consciousness of the need of the heathen at home became more and more acute. Between the years 1780 and 1810 Associations of Congregational Churches were formed in most of the counties with the object of helping the poorer Churches, founding new Churches, and generally doing aggressive and evangelistic work. As time went on the experience of these associations demonstrated the importance and advantage of co-operation and fellowship among the Churches, and so prepared the way for the wider union of Churches of which we must speak in its place. But already men were discovering that the autonomy of the individual Church, however valuable, did not necessarily mean selfish isolation, and that union for mutual help and common action was quite compatible with the hardly-won and jealously-guarded freedom.

Other agencies formed under the new impulse of these days were the Irish Evangelical Society and the Home Missionary Society, whose titles sufficiently indicate the scope of their activities. And time would fail us to tell of the share which Congregationalists took in the great philanthropic movements of the time, such as the agitations for the abolition of slavery and for prison reform. In the latter enterprise a pioneer was John Howard, a Congregationalist of Bedford. A member of Bunyan Meeting, he left the Church when it elected a

Baptist as its Minister, and established another Congregational Church in the town which has ever since been known by his name, and stands an abiding memorial to one of the noblest and most self-sacrificing characters Congregationalism ever produced.

At this period also we have to note among Independents, both ministers and laymen, the stirrings of a new social conscience. The times were bad and in the working-class Churches there was much sympathy with Chartism and other quasi-revolutionary movements. Many Dissenters, too, at an earlier date, had not troubled to conceal their fellow-feeling for the revolutionaries in France, and when the American War broke out they were consistently in opposition to the policy of the Government. They felt that it stood for a kind of tyranny which, if it were successful abroad, would be sure to react against them and their kind at home. All this, while it testified to a clearer grasp of the practical implications of their religion, did not increase their popularity, and gave suitable occasion to their enemies to blaspheme. It marked, too, a loosening of the ties which had bound them to the Whig interest, and the growth of a radical temper which was to bear much fruit in the future.

CHAPTER XI

THE STRUGGLE FOR LIBERTY AND EQUALITY

FROM the time of the Evangelical Revival onwards Nonconformists were engaged in gradually consolidating their position and shaking themselves free from the various disabilities under which they laboured. Without making any invidious distinctions, it may be said that the Independents among them, Baptist and Congregationalist alike, were always in the van of progress and the foremost advocates of freedom, religious and political. But the fight was not always carried on with uniform zeal and energy. There were periods of lukewarmness and inaction. This was especially the case in the early days of the Revival when the attention of the Churches was concentrated on their evangelistic message, and all other considerations tended to fall into the background. As long as they were free to deliver their message they were less acutely conscious of other restrictions on their freedom. To some extent, however, the Revival helped even in the political arena. The new-found life made men more eager to assert their rights and more conscious of restrictions.

The first battle in the campaign took place over the compulsory liability of Dissenters to serve in the office of Sheriff. The Corporation of London had passed a by-law imposing heavy fines on those who refused to serve

on being elected. They made a practice of electing known Nonconformists who then naturally declined to qualify for office by taking the Sacrament in the Church of England. They were duly fined and the fines allotted to the fund for building a new Mansion House.¹ A test case was brought by the Dissenting Deputies and the Corporation lost it, and Lord Mansfield, in giving judgment against them, delivered himself in the strongest terms against all such forms of religious persecution.

Then began a long and intermittent struggle for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. It was preceded by an attempt to relieve Nonconformist Ministers from the obligation to subscribe the greater part of the thirty-nine Articles in which the Unitarian Presbyterians took a leading part. This was defeated in the House of Lords, but ultimately passed in 1779, when a general declaration of belief in the Scriptures as the Word of God was substituted for the Articles. It was in the course of the early debates on this proposal that the Earl of Chatham gave his famous defence of the Dissenters. The Archbishop of York had charged their Ministers with being men of "close ambition". "They are so, my Lords", Chatham replied, "and their ambition is to keep close to the college of fishermen, not of Cardinals, and to the doctrines of inspired Apostles, not to the decrees of interested and aspiring Bishops. They contend for a scriptural and spiritual worship; we have a Calvinistic creed, a popish Liturgy, an Arminian clergy. The Reformation has laid open the Scriptures to all; let not the Bishops shut them again. Laws in

¹ Cf. an article by Rev William Pierce on "The contributions of Nonconformists to the building of the Mansion House", *Transactions of the Congregational History Society*, ix, p. 146.

support of ecclesiastical power are pleaded which it would shock humanity to execute. It is said that religious sects have done great mischiefs when they were not kept under restraints; but history affords no proof that sects have never been mischievous when they were not oppressed and persecuted by the ruling Church." These debates did much to clarify and harden Nonconformist opinion on the subject of creeds and tests and on authority in the Church, and prepared the way for the greater struggles that were to come. In the course of them Robert Robinson, a Baptist Minister of Cambridge, laid down the position that "The English Nonconformists absolutely deny all human authority in matters of religion—they deny it to all civil governments of every form—they think Jesus Christ the sole head of the Christian Church". This unequivocal restatement of the early Independent position struck a new note at the time, but one which henceforth became dominant.

The first attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts were unsuccessful. But the agitation had the effect of bringing Charles James Fox round to the side of the Dissenters, and of stirring them to organized efforts to remove all their disabilities. The Church party had become alarmed at the growth of Nonconformity, and sought to impose new restrictions on their Ministers, but without success. This led to a further movement of defence in the formation of the "Protestant society for the Promotion of Religious Liberty". The new Society had an immediate success in securing the repeal of the Conventicle and Five Mile Acts and the Quakers' Oaths Act. They had long fallen into desuetude, but it was indicative of a new spirit that they should have been so easily removed from the statute book. After these

was repealed the old law subjecting Unitarians to penalties for blasphemy, and the way was then clear for a new attack on the Test and Corporation Acts. The previous agitation had done its work, and it was now easy to persuade even Bishops that to make the Sacrament "a picklock to a place" ¹ was a shameful misuse. The obnoxious Acts were repealed in March 1828, though magistrates and municipal officers were still required to promise that they would do nothing to subvert the Church of England or disturb it in its privileges.

Among the Congregational Ministers who were active during this period were Dr. David Bogue, of Gosport, head of an Academy there. He had written against the Test Acts, and was one of the founders of the London Missionary Society. He was a grave and weighty man with a fine capacity for leadership. He had as a fellow-worker George Burder, of Fetter Lane Chapel, Secretary of the London Missionary Society, and editor of the *Evangelical Magazine*. Samuel Palmer, of Hackney, was perhaps the best known Congregational preacher of his time, and a stout advocate of religious freedom. Editor of the *Protestant Dissenters' Magazine*, he wrote the *Nonconformists' Memorial* (compiled from Calamy), and the *Protestant Dissenters' Catechism*. Dr. Collyer, of Hanover Chapel, Peckham, was another popular

¹ Apropos of this abuse the poet Cowper had written :

Hast thou, by statute shov'd from its design
The Savior's feast, his own blest bread and wine,
And made the symbols of atoning grace
An office key, a picklock to a place,
That infidels may prove their title good,
By an oath dipped in sacramental blood ?
A blot that will be still a blot, in spite
Of all that grave apologists may write ;
And though a Bishop toil to cleanse the stain,
He wipes and scours the silver cup in vain

preacher, a foppish type of man who moved in fashionable circles and was a personal friend of the Duke of Kent. William Bull, of Newport Pagnell, devoted his life to the service of this country town where three generations of his family filled the same pulpit for a hundred years. He and Thomas Northcote Toller, of Kettering, were the most influential Ministers in the Midlands, the latter especially notable for the zeal with which he supported the newly-formed British and Foreign Bible Society.

After the repeal of the Test and Corporations Acts Nonconformists rapidly became a real power in the State. They still suffered under many disabilities, but they felt now that they had a right to exist and to call their souls their own. Their polemics, therefore, took a new turn, and the struggle for freedom gave place to a struggle for equality. Here the Established Church played into their hands by its claims to control the religious education of the country on the one hand, and on the other by its hostility to Parliamentary Reform. The whole question of the relation of Church and State, and of the legitimacy of a religious establishment, now came to the front. In 1829 was formed a Society for Promoting Ecclesiastical Knowledge, or in other words, for the production and distribution of books and pamphlets dealing with the principles of Nonconformity. Many leading Congregationalists took part in it, among them being John Blackburn, editor of the *Congregational Magazine*, and Robert Vaughan, editor of the *British Quarterly Review*. Many of the publications of the Society dealt with questions such as tithes and Establishment, and that in a way which was regarded in Anglican circles as revolutionary. At the same time the attack on the Establishment was greatly strengthened

by the rise of the voluntary movement in Scotland. There Presbyterians and Congregationalists united in declaring State Churches to be contrary to the Word of God and an invasion of the crown rights of Jesus Christ. Voluntary associations were formed in most of the great towns, and soon spread to the country. In other words, Nonconformity became now organized for the defence of its newly-won freedom and for attack on the privileges of the Established Church.

It was a moment when organization was in the air, and even the Churches which made much of their Independence could not avoid the infection. We have seen in most of the English counties the Independent Ministers and Churches had formed associations for mutual help and advice. For some time past proposals for a wider and more comprehensive union had been under discussion, and in 1832, at a meeting of representatives of the various county associations, the Congregational Union of England and Wales was duly formed. The idea was received with a good deal of misgiving, and at first did not command the assent of all the Churches. It was feared that the Union would become an authority over the Churches, and that it would be necessary to exact some standard of orthodoxy from the Churches joining it. On the other hand, the advantages of Union had been abundantly demonstrated in the County Associations, and there was much that a Union could do for the Churches which they could not do for themselves in isolation. In any case the position was fully safeguarded in the constitution which was ultimately adopted, a constitution which has since been revised and modified three or four times, and always in the direction of greater freedom and elasticity. The Union, as now

constituted, is a free federation of Congregational Churches. The qualifications for membership are that a Church shall have a separate roll of members, shall be connected with a County Union, and shall subscribe to the funds of the larger Union. The Union functions through a Council and its executive, and through the Assembly. The Assembly meets twice a year and is the ultimate authority and court of appeal. It consists of all the Ministers of Churches duly recognized by County Unions, and of lay representatives of such Churches, men or women, appointed in the proportion of one to every hundred members or part of a hundred, with a maximum of four. A certain number of honorary members are elected annually, but have no voting power. The Assembly is presided over by a Chairman elected annually by ballot. In practice the Assembly has proved rather an unwieldy body for purposes of debate and legislation, but apart from that it serves a very important purpose. It is thoroughly representative of the Churches throughout the country, and is well able to express their mind in its resolutions and to act as a clearing-house for opinions. Its meetings are impressive by their size and enthusiasm, and though they seem to the outsider sometimes only to end in talk and to give too great an opportunity for mere rhetoric, they really accomplish very much more. To the delegates who attend them, and especially to those from remote and quiet places, they are a real and needed inspiration. These men and women come to realize that they are part of a great company of like-minded folk who stand behind them in their difficult and often lonely task. They realize, too, that their independency is not mere isolation, and they go back to their work with a new vision and a new stimulus.

The Council consists of about three hundred elected members, ministerial and lay, representing the County Unions, and not more than twenty-five co-opted members. It prepares the business of the Assembly and presents to the Assembly annual reports on all the departments of the work of the Union. It co-ordinates the work of its own Executive Committee and of the various departmental committees of the Union. The tendency of recent years has been to centralize in its hands all the work of the Union. But of this and of certain other quite modern developments we shall speak later. The relations between the Churches and the Union are set forth in the following Preamble to the Constitution of the Union.

1. Certain powers and duties belong to the individual Church in self-government under the Headship of the Lord Jesus Christ, due regard being had to the interests of other Churches of our own and other denominations. For example : The reception and dismissal of members ; the discipline necessary to preserve purity of communion ; the election of pastor and deacons ; the order of worship ; financial arrangements ; and all that concerns the internal administration of the Church.

2. Certain duties and responsibilities concern Congregational Churches as a whole, and these can be most effectively fulfilled by a union of Churches. For example : Congregational Church extension, and the promotion of missionary work at home and abroad ; the assistance of Churches needing support ; the introduction to the ministry of properly qualified and suitable men ; the support of Congregational Colleges in the training of Ministers ; the admission of none but worthy persons to the privileges of the Denomination and of *The Union* ; the provision of facilities for the settlement and removal of Ministers ; the adequate support of the ministry ; the assistance, when necessary, of Ministers of good standing disabled by age or

infirmity ; the bringing of Congregational societies and institutions into closer connection with *The Union* and with each other, and the brotherly co-operation with other Christian denominations in the extension of the Kingdom of God.

We return now to the years 1832, 1833, when the Union was first constituted. The really burning question which then had to be faced was that of the doctrinal basis of the Union, and it was settled on lines which were generally in accordance with Congregational usage. A declaration of Faith and Order was agreed to, for the information of the public as to the beliefs and practices of the Congregational Churches. It was expressly stipulated that the declaration was not to be regarded as a creed, and assent to it was not to be required from any Church Minister or member of a Church. It was meant to be purely informative, and its interest now is merely historical, for it pretty faithfully reflects the theological position of Congregationalists at the time at which it was drawn up.¹ If it be compared with the Savoy Declaration of 1658, the extent to which modern Congregationalists have departed from the unbending Calvinism of their fathers can easily be estimated. The following extracts will sufficiently indicate the rather thin type of theology for which it stands.

¹ The preamble concludes with the following significant paragraph : " They wish it to be observed that notwithstanding their jealousy of subscription to creeds and articles, and their disapproval of the imposition of any human standard, whether of faith or discipline, they are far more agreed in their doctrines and practices than any Church which enjoins subscription and enforces a human standard of orthodoxy ; and they believe that there is no Minister and no Church among them that would deny the substance of any one of the following doctrines of religion, though each might prefer to state his sentiments in his own way."

They believe that God is revealed in the scriptures as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and that to each are attributable the same Divine properties and perfections. The doctrine of the Divine existence, as above stated, they cordially believe without attempting fully to explain.

They believe that . . . our Lord Jesus Christ was both the Son of man and the Son of God ; partaking fully and truly of human nature, though without sin ; equal with the Father and " the express image of His person ".

They believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, revealed either personally in His own ministry, or by the Holy Spirit in the ministry of His apostles, the whole mind of God for our salvation ; and that by His obedience to the Divine Law while He lived and by His sufferings unto death, He meritoriously " obtained eternal redemption for us " ; having thereby vindicated and illustrated Divine justice, " magnified the Law " and " brought in everlasting righteousness."

They believe that all who will be saved were the objects of God's eternal and electing love, and were given by an act of Divine sovereignty to the Son of God ; which in no way interferes with the system of means, nor with the grounds of human responsibility ; being wholly unrevealed as to its objects and not a rule of human duty.

They believe in the perpetual obligation of Baptism and the Lord's Supper ; the former to be administered to all converts to Christianity and their children by the application of water to the subject " in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost " ; and the latter to be celebrated by Christian Churches as a token of faith in the Saviour and of brotherly love.

From these quotations it becomes quite obvious that the Declaration was not intended as a serious contribution to theological restatement, still less as an expression of the faith in language which could be regarded as in any sense complete and final. It may be described as

the work of preachers rather than of theologians, and as expressing in somewhat loose terms the doctrinal forms in which their message was generally cast. Even at the time it was issued it was not universally approved. One eminent Minister described it as "unsatisfactory and lamentable". But it served its purpose as a convenient declaration of things most surely believed. As such it was printed for many years in the *Congregational Year Book*. But its place there knows it no longer, and it now merely evokes an antiquarian interest.

In regard to Church order the Declaration restated in simple language the characteristic Independent position with regard to the autonomy of each individual Church, its right to elect its own Ministers and officers, and the consequent necessity of ensuring that the membership of the Church be confined to those whose conduct and experience gave evidence of their real Christianity.

From the time of the formation of the Union until the present day Congregationalists have been much occupied with the constitutional question, and it may be that they have not yet reached a final solution. The difficulty of reconciling Independency and Congregationalism was a very real one, and the way in which it has been surmounted, though it has involved some sacrifices, has proved the wisdom of trusting to the guidance of the Spirit of God rather than to a hard-and-fast organization. As we shall see later, organized Congregationalism, which some regard as a contradiction in terms, has reached a completeness never contemplated by its originators, and has made for practical efficiency without in any way destroying liberty.

One of the first and most useful effects of the Union was to give to Congregationalists a new sense of power

and solidarity in their fight against ecclesiastical privilege. From this time onwards they took a leading part in the struggle and began to move from defence to attack. The Declaration had explicitly stated that "the power of a Christian Church is purely spiritual, and should in no way be corrupted by union with temporal or civil power". The first meeting of the Union passed a series of resolutions at the instance of Dr. Baldwin Brown affirming the rights of Dissenters in regard to Marriage, Burial, Church rates, Tithes and University Education. Shortly afterwards Mr. Binney, then the leading Congregational preacher in London, spoke very strongly against the principle of the State Establishment of religion, and began the organization of Congregational opinion against it. The first fruit of the agitation was the securing to Nonconformists the right to be married in their own Chapels. In 1841 Mr. Edward Miall, a Congregational Minister of Leicester, came to London and founded the *Nonconformist* newspaper, which at once took the lead in the attack on the Establishment. Mr. Miall ultimately went into Parliament and was long recognized as the leader in the fight for religious equality. A shrewd and capable man, a fine speaker and a born journalist, he stood out as the embodiment of political dissent. No man was better hated in his time; but there is no questioning his sincerity and his self-sacrificing zeal in support of the cause he had at heart. He was largely responsible for the founding of the Society for the Liberation of Religion from State Patronage and Control, and he lived to see the abolition of Church rates, the Disestablishment of the Irish Church, and the opening of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge to Nonconformity.

Two events happened in the middle of the century which were not without effect on the Disestablishment struggle. The first was the decision on the Gorham case in 1850, the practical result of which was to make it possible that clergy in the Anglican Church might hold directly opposite views on the subject of Baptismal regeneration. On this Mr. Miall wrote in the *Nonconformist*: "In the same Church patronized and supported by the same State, and conjoined together in the same apostolical body, and both conforming their religious opinions to the same standard of faith—for baptismal regeneration as taught by Dr. Pusey is not decided to be no doctrine of the establishment nor is it likely to be—we have two large sects differing with each other on what each regards as fundamental to Christianity, and sharing the temporalities set apart by the State for the religious instruction of the people. Well, now, whilst this fact stares us in the face, whatever may be urged in favour of a national Establishment, let us not be told any more that the Church of England is an united, holy, and apostolic *Church*. If its code of faith, its rubric and its formularies are so constructed—and that, too, purposely—as to comprehend in one body teachers or members who differ *toto caelo* on the very essentials of religious belief, to all intents and purposes it must cease to be regarded as a Church in any sense. It offers no common bond of Union." Since the time that this was written nothing has happened to lessen the anomaly thus described. Indeed, it is so generally recognized that it has ceased to be regarded as offering a reason for Disestablishment.

The next event referred to is the religious census of 1857. This showed that Nonconformity now practically

accounted for half the Church-going population of these islands. It also showed that there were more than five million people outside all the Churches, and the immediate effect on Nonconformists was at once to quicken their concern for evangelistic work, and to give them a new confidence in asserting their rights against a privileged Establishment. They soon found an increased opportunity for doing both these things in connection with religious education. It should always be remembered that the first organized efforts at a system of elementary education were made by the Nonconformists. In the year 1808 Congregationalists were largely instrumental in founding the British and Foreign School Society which established and maintained many day schools generally in connection with Dissenting Chapels. Three years later was founded the National Society for educating the children of the poor in the principles of the Church of England. In time both Societies came to receive Government grants for their schools, but as the grants were given in proportion to the amounts raised locally, it followed that the richest Church received the largest grants. The part which Congregationalists played in the subsequent struggles may be briefly summarized as follows. At first their older Ministers and parliamentary leaders were opposed to any State provision of education. Later, when this position was abandoned, Congregationalists always insisted that any education provided by the State should be unsectarian. On the other hand, it was a natural result of the privileged position of the Establishment that Anglican clergy should regard themselves as responsible for education and should insist on its being carried out on Anglican lines. The fact must be admitted

that Nonconformists have never been quite logical or true to their principles in the matter of religious education. They have never asked that Free Church principles should be taught in State-aided schools. But they were willing to receive public grants for their British Schools, and when Board schools were established they acquiesced in the provision of undenominational religious teaching at the public expense. It is true that many of them, Congregationalists and Unitarians in particular, were profoundly dissatisfied with this solution, but very few were prepared to go the length of advocating a purely secular system such as the logic of their position really demanded. When the Anglican schools were put on the rates, Congregationalists joined heartily in protest and resistance, but even this agitation died a natural death. Most Congregationalists now recognize that it is the will of the British public that religious teaching should be given in the public schools, and their chief concern is that the teaching should be really good, and that it should be confined to such study of the Bible and explanation of the elementary truths of Christianity as are suited to the needs and comprehension of young children. They believe that there is a common Christianity underlying all sectarian interpretations, and that this can be taught to children, and they will continue to resist all attempts on the part of the Anglican Church to get a footing for Anglican teaching in what are now called the Council schools. At the same time it must be admitted that a great change has come over Congregationalists in recent years with regard to their attitude to the Anglican Church. Though they are not prepared to make any concession of principles, they are no longer animated by the old sectarian jealousy and

bitterness. They recognize that the interests of the Kingdom of God are greater than those of any of the Churches, and they are more concerned to set their own house in order and perfect themselves for the work in hand than spend themselves in more or less barren controversies. The experiment of Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales has proved so successful that most Anglicans are beginning to realize the benefits of freedom. Nonconformists can be content to wait until the lesson has been thoroughly learnt.

CHAPTER XII

CONGREGATIONAL MOVEMENTS OUTSIDE ENGLAND

CONGREGATIONALISM, as we have already seen, has within it a certain power of spontaneous generation. When men with the New Testament in their hands once become spiritually awakened they tend almost inevitably to the Congregational form of Church order. A striking example of this is seen in Scotland, where Congregationalism, though always something of an exotic, has had a very definite witness to give. The Free Church principle so splendidly vindicated by one section of the Presbyterian Church was only carried to its logical conclusions by Congregationalism. For all their heroism even the Covenanters never quite escaped from the dogmatic and ecclesiastical bondage of their time. It was in the first quarter of the eighteenth century that the stirring of a new spirit began to be felt. One, John Glas, a village Minister, near Dundee, was deposed from his ministry for teaching that a National Church had no warrant in Scripture, and that the Covenant ought not to be made binding upon men as a condition of entrance into the Church. He formed an Independent Church and continued in it even after his sentence of deposition was rescinded, and his example was followed by the formation of several other Churches on his model. These Churches were called Glasite, and

there arose a little community under this name in London, of which Michael Faraday was a prominent member. The Glasite Churches stood for a very literal interpretation of Scripture and a rather dry type of evangelism. Along with them must be ranked the Sandemanians, led by Robert Sandeman, a son-in-law of Glas. These, too, were independent in policy and stood for theological freedom, but caused much controversy by their peculiar views on the Atonement. They taught that the fact was sufficient apart from any theory, or as Sandeman's tombstone in America puts it, "the bare death of Jesus Christ without a thought or deed on the part of man is sufficient to present the chief of sinners spotless before God". Very few representatives, either of Glasites or Sandemanians, now remain.

The next outbreak of Congregationalism in Scotland was due to the brothers Haldane—ancestors of a family that has since become famous in other fields. They were retired naval officers of intense missionary spirit who in their concern for men's needs began preaching up and down the country. Their work was condemned by the General Assembly of the Scottish Church as that of vagrant and unauthorized teachers, but they persisted and were encouraged by the help of leading Independent Ministers from England. James Haldane founded a Congregational Church in Edinburgh, and was ordained as its Minister. But the movement suffered from its very freedom. Some of the followers of the Haldanes became Baptists, and others Plymouth Brethren. But Congregationalism had now obtained a strong foothold in the North. A Union of the Churches was formed, and under the guidance of men like Greville, Ewing and Ralph Wardlaw, steps were taken to provide

a trained ministry and keep the Churches true to the twin ideals of theological freedom and religious fervour. It was the theological question that conditioned the further progress of Congregationalism in Scotland. The Church of Scotland, Established and Secession, was theologically intolerant and consistent in devotion to the standards of the Westminster Confession. Within a short time of each other, McLeod Campbell was expelled from the Church of Scotland, and James Morison from the Secession Church, each of them for preaching the universality of the Atonement and the love of God for all men. Thus began a definite break away from the Calvinism of the Confession and the establishment of the Evangelical Union, a federation of Churches of broader outlook on the basis of freedom from any creed subscription. It was intended that the Union should be one within Presbyterianism, but the Churches themselves declared in favour of a Congregational order, and a theological college was founded of which Morison was the Principal for many years, and which definitely prepared men for the Congregational ministry. Perhaps the best known of its students was the late Dr. Fairbairn. In 1897 the Evangelical Union was absorbed in the Congregational Union of Scotland, and it did a work for theological freedom far out of proportion to its numbers. Congregationalism in Scotland was never very strong or widespread, but it helped to leaven the Calvinistic lump and to keep alive the spirit of freedom which was so finely manifested at the disruption, and ultimately triumphed in the theological discussions which centred round the work and person of Robertson Smith. Even to-day it represents a broader temper in theology, and a more

elastic form of Church order in a country where both are in danger of becoming somewhat stereotyped and formal.

Scottish Independency has made very good contributions to theological learning and to missionary enterprise. The work of Ralph Wardlaw, Lindsay Alexander and James Morison, with its Biblical and practical emphasis served to give theological expression to their gospel. It broke down the rigid Calvinistic view of the Atonement, opened up the way for the teaching of the Fatherhood of God, and emphasized the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Churches. Both Fairbairn, and Forsyth in England were products of Scottish Independency. To the same source must be traced some of the greatest pioneers of modern missionary enterprise. Moffat, Livingstone and Mackenzie, of Africa, Milne and Legge, of China, and Gilmour, of Mongolia, were all trained in Independent Churches in Scotland, and were men of whom any Church might be proud.

The history of Congregationalism in Wales is practically that of the whole Nonconformist movement in the principality. The Welsh people became Dissenters, not so much from original naughtiness or Free Church conviction, but because of the entire failure of the Established Church to meet the religious needs of the people. The clergy had been for a long time corrupt and immoral, and many of them unable to speak the language of the country. It was not, however, until 1639 that the first Independent Church was formed at Llanvaches in Monmouthshire under the guidance of William Wroth and Walter Cradock. The latter, a very able man, became one of Cromwell's Triers, and devoted himself to the work of the propagation of the gospel in

Wales. He is thought, too, to have been responsible for the first translation of the Bible into Welsh. About the same time a Welsh mystical writer, Morgan Lloyd, of Wrexham (1619-1659), published a little book called *The Book of the Three Birds*. It is an allegorical dialogue between the Raven (the English Church), the Eagle (Cromwell and his Independents), and the Dove (the ideal Church). In it the writer remonstrates in friendly way with Cromwell and his Government for endowing their Churches and persecuting Quakers and others. He makes a strong plea for a purely voluntary system and for entire liberty of conscience—a straw showing the way of the wind. In 1662 some 106 Welsh Ministers were ejected from their livings. In the evil times which followed Welsh Nonconformists were banded together under persecution, and grew in numbers and zeal. Then followed a time of reaction and stagnation until the Evangelical Revival, when the new spirit seized all the Free Churches alike, and gave them a tremendous impetus. The growth of Independency may be measured by the following figures. In 1715 there were 35 Independent Churches in Wales. In 1742 they had increased to 88. In 1861 they numbered 766, and at the present time they are well over 1,000. While these only represent a fraction of the Free Churches of Wales, they have played a great part in the religious life of the country. The people of Wales have a genius for religion, and especially for religious as well as for secular education. In the Congregational Churches there have been many great preachers, some of whom have done splendid service in English pulpits, and the Churches have never lacked a succession of scholars and of men who have given themselves freely to the

political and religious emancipation of the country. There are two English Congregational Unions in Wales, North and South, affiliated with the Congregational Union of England. There is also a Union of Welsh Independent Churches, divided into District Unions, covering the whole country. The Churches support two colleges—the Memorial College at Brecon, and the Bala Bangor Independent College now at Bangor. In addition there is a strong Congregational element both among students and teaching staff in the Presbyterian College at Carmarthen. In recent years the whole religious situation in Wales has been profoundly changed by the Disestablishment of the Anglican Church. While it is too early yet to judge of the full effects of this change, it is already obvious that it is turning out greatly to the advantage of the Anglicans. But Non-conformists, too, stand to gain by it if they will be true to themselves. It certainly does not mean that their occupation is gone. Congregationalists in particular have a great opportunity of furthering that spiritual religion and that positive Free Churchmanship for which they have always stood.

Congregationalists in Ireland are a feeble folk. At the last census they numbered just under ten thousand. Except in Belfast their Churches are small, and few and far between. But they are thoroughly evangelistic in spirit and very conscious that they have still a distinctive witness to give, and that there is special need for it in a Roman Catholic country. The history of Independency in Ireland begins with the Cromwellian settlements, but it was not until the revival in Scotland under the Haldanes that the Churches attained any power. That movement spread very quickly to Northern

Ireland, and the Churches born in the revival continue to this day, and have never quite lost the evangelical spirit. In 1829 the Irish Congregational Union was formed. In 1899 it absorbed the Irish Evangelical Society, and continues not merely to foster friendly and helpful relations among its constituent Churches, but has served to band them together for that aggressive work in which they have always found their chief *raison d'être*.

It is hardly possible to exaggerate the importance of Congregationalism as a system, over against Independency, in places where Free Churchmanship has a struggle to exist. If union is strength anywhere, it is here, and the lesson which United Congregationalism has to teach is one which may well be borne in mind by all those who are seeking a larger Christian unity. Churches may be linked together for mutual support and for aggressive work without losing their spiritual autonomy or individuality. Union does not involve uniformity, and need not do anything to crush either freedom or enterprise.

Turning now to the development of Congregationalism in America, we find that the history of the Churches in the old country in some ways repeated itself in the new. The enthusiasm of the foundation period gradually died down, and religion became theologically lifeless and practically barren. This state of things lasted until 1734, when the great revival under Jonathan Edwards took place, followed a few years later by a further revival through the preaching of George Whitefield. The highly emotional character of these revivals caused them to be regarded with great suspicion by the older and more sober type of Churches, and made them somewhat evanescent in their effects. They were followed

by a period of lethargy and theological controversy. From this two types of theology emerged. First the characteristic New England theology, a modified Calvinism which dominated the Congregational Churches well into the nineteenth century, and secondly a more liberal theology which gradually grew in influence and was greatly helped by the work of Channing. In 1805 it captured Harvard College, and in 1815 split off into a new denomination and called itself Unitarian. Meanwhile the political disturbance caused by the revolution had died down, and Congregationalism proper had begun to take great strides forward. A new period of revival set in, less emotional and more permanent in its results. At the beginning of the century many new colleges were founded, and a theological department was set up at Yale, thus compensating for the loss of Harvard. It was a time of great missionary activity, and the American Board of Foreign Missions began its work in 1810. Home missionary work, too, was organized among the negroes, the Indians and the new immigrants. The Congregational Union for building Churches was formed to meet a felt need, and was largely responsible for the rapid extension of Congregationalism in the West. In all this work Congregationalists and Presbyterians moved side by side in a real spirit of co-operation. There was talk even of a definite union between them, but it was opposed by the older type of Presbyterians, and under the Albany convention of 1850 the idea was definitely abandoned, and Congregationalism began to realize a new sense of solidarity and to organize itself for fresh activities. We have seen already how the first Puritan settlers in America were influenced by the Independency of the

Pilgrim Fathers, and practically adopted their form of Church order. After a time this process began to be reversed. The Puritan influence became stronger than the Separatist, and the Independent Churches were so far affected by Presbyterianism as to lay more stress on their Congregationalism than on their Independency. From 1850 onwards the Congregational Churches felt the need to draw closer together for purposes of mutual help and for aggressive efforts, and also in order to co-ordinate the various organizations through which this work was largely being done. To meet this need there grew up a system of Church Councils which is different from anything that obtains among the English Congregational Churches. A National Council composed of Ministers and lay delegates is called every two years to discuss matters of moment to the Churches, and to communicate to them such opinions and resolutions as may be decided upon. The Council possesses no authority, and has no permanent standing, but it goes without saying that its decisions carry great weight. In addition to this, local councils may be called *ad hoc* to deal with matters affecting the Churches in a particular area, and State councils or conferences now meet at regular intervals to deal with matters affecting the Congregational Churches in each State. Naturally and inevitably these councils have acquired more than merely advisory powers. In some cases the recognizing of Ministers and the licensing of preachers has passed into their hands. In 1865 the first National Council issued a brief statement of faith, and in 1883 under the auspices of the National Council of that year what is called the Commission Creed was set forth as a declaration of faith commonly accepted by the Churches. In

both cases it was clearly understood that the declaration meant no more than the word implies. It was never to be regarded as a doctrinal test, or an imposition either upon Ministers or Churches, save in so far as they might voluntarily adopt it for their own purposes.¹

Theologically the Congregational Churches of America have remained nominally Calvinistic, but have greatly modified their Calvinism in practice if they have not now entirely abandoned it. As early as 1865 they began to welcome Arminians to their membership, and their spirit now is thoroughly evangelical, and at the same time theologically progressive. They undoubtedly owe a great deal to the work of Horace Bushnell, the greatest theologian among American Congregationalists and one too little known. He was a man of intense piety and deep religious experience, and his theology grew out of his life. By all the standards of the time he was a heretic, and he suffered accordingly. But like most heretics he was also a pioneer, and the New Theology identified with his name leavened the stiff mass of American orthodoxy from that time onwards. It was largely owing to his unconscious influence that after the revival in the middle of the century American Congregational theology assumed a milder form and a more evangelical spirit.

In America, as elsewhere, Congregationalism has all the defects of its qualities. It is a little inclined to intellectual superiority and flourishes best among middle-class and fairly-cultured people. Though it has a fine missionary spirit and has done in educational

¹ For the whole question of Ecclesiastical Councils in American Congregationalism, cf. Dr. Dexter, *The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years*, p. 521.

missions all over the world a work second to none, it lacks the popular appeal and the full-blooded evangelistic note. It does not, therefore, increase very rapidly, and has little or no hold of the vast mixed populations of the West and South. But it takes more than its share in educational reform and in social service. In the recently formed Federal Council of the Churches of America, it has played, and continues to play, a leading part. It has been foremost, too, among the American Churches in establishing schools and colleges, but always in an entirely unsectarian spirit, throwing them open to all comers. Its theological open-mindedness has saved it from many of the conflicts and eccentricities which have marked the history of some other of the American Churches.

The story of Congregationalism in various parts of the British Empire is a somewhat chequered one, and not altogether encouraging. It has to be admitted that the Congregational system is not well fitted for pioneer work in new countries. It is not that the Churches have lacked enterprise or the missionary spirit. But they have not possessed the resources and the closeness of organization which pioneer work requires.

In Canada the Congregationalists number about 30,000, and were formed into two Unions—the Congregational Union of Canada, and the Union of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Both of these are now merged in the United Church of Canada, comprising most of the Presbyterian and practically all of the Methodist and Congregational Churches. In the establishment of this Union, Congregationalists played a great part in securing the full rights of the individual Church and freedom from theological tests. The Union is as yet in an experimental stage, but in the sparsely

populated country districts, and among an heterogeneous population of immigrants, will be able to do a work which the Congregational Churches alone could never accomplish.

In South Africa, Congregationalism owes much to the London Missionary Society. There was a Union of Evangelical Churches formed in 1859 from which sprang the Congregational Union of South Africa in 1877, and this absorbed the Natal Union in 1900. There is no theological college properly speaking, but students for the ministry are trained at certain educational institutions like the Dower Memorial College, Uitenhage, Lovedale and Tiger Kloof. A very good work is done among the native population, and in the larger towns there are some flourishing Churches largely manned by Ministers who have been trained in England.

In Australia, Congregationalism dates from about the middle of last century, but the Congregational Union of Australia and New Zealand was not formed till 1888. It comprises the Unions of New South Wales, of Queensland, of South Australia, of Victoria, of West Australia, of New Zealand and of Tasmania. There are three colleges—Camden College, Sydney, Parkin College, Adelaide, and the Congregational College, Victoria. In the large towns, again, Congregationalism is fairly strong, and appeals to the better educated middle-class people. In country districts, however, it is faced by immense difficulties owing to the isolation of the Churches and the great distances which separate them. Like all the other Churches, it is suffering at present from the growing materialization of life among a prosperous pleasure-loving population.

There are strong Congregational Unions in British Guiana and Jamaica, and a flourishing Congregational

Mission in Sierra Leone. In the East a few Congregational Churches are to be found in India and China, with a considerable number in Japan and offshoots from them in Korea.

Speaking generally of Congregationalism in Greater Britain it has to be admitted that while it has played its part and given its testimony it has also shown that it is but ill-fitted for the kind of work which the conditions in new countries have demanded. This is not altogether due to the fact that its Independent spirit has made combination difficult. The real trouble has been that in communities composed of men and women often of different nationalities and varying degrees of culture it has been almost impossible to create and foster that Church spirit and community of aim which is the life of a Congregational Church. In many cases, too, even when Congregational Unions were formed, the Churches composing them were either hostile to anything like connectionalism or embraced it too late for it to do its work well. In the face of these disadvantages the really remarkable fact is that Congregationalism should have taken any hold at all in these new countries. That it should have done so much evangelistic work and witnessed so consistently for religious freedom and theological progress and enlightenment is greatly to its credit, and would have been impossible without the constant fostering care of the Colonial Missionary Society.¹

It was largely in order to strengthen and encourage these Churches overseas that the project of holding International Congregational Councils at stated periods was initiated. The first of these Councils was held in

¹ Founded in 1836.

London in 1891, the second in Boston in 1899, the third in Edinburgh in 1908, and the fourth in Boston again in 1920, the long interval between the two last being accounted for by the Great War. At these Councils representatives of the Congregational Churches from all over the world have met together in the interests of their common work. The meetings have served as a kind of clearing-house of ideas and have been fruitful in suggestion and inspiration. Every possible subject of concern to the Churches has been discussed, and ideas both new and old freely ventilated.¹ It is an easy criticism to say that it all ended in talk, but the talk itself was worth while, for it enabled fellow-workers in different countries and under varied conditions to understand one another's needs and problems, and to gather many hints and suggestions for the future efficiency of their work. Such councils are worth holding, if only to keep to the front the world-wide Mission of Congregationalism, and to deliver the Churches, both in old and new countries, from that tendency to parochialism which too easily besets them. They are worth holding, too, in order to give a sense of solidarity and support to those whose lot is cast in remote and difficult places. One lesson which Congregationalists may derive from their long history is that there is always need for their distinctive witness to the freedom and spirituality of the Church. They are more truly catholic than any other branch of the Christian Church, and it is an altogether right and proper thing that they should from time to time give to their witness an œcumenical expression.

¹ The proceedings of these councils have been published in a series of volumes which contain matter of the greatest interest to the student of Congregationalism.

CHAPTER XIII

CONGREGATIONAL THEOLOGY

THE contribution of Congregationalism to theology has been neither very considerable nor very distinctive. It has, however, been fruitful out of all proportion to its bulk, and that mainly for two reasons. In the first place it has never lost sight of practical issues. The Congregational theologians have not been cloistered academics, but, generally speaking, men with pastoral experience and a wide knowledge of human nature. They have written, as it were *ad hoc*, with an eye to the building up of men and women in the faith, and so with a positive and practical rather than a merely speculative interest and intention. In the next place, and by consequence, they have generally been on the side of progress. Their freedom from dogmatic presuppositions has stood them in good stead, and has enabled them to make good use of such new light as has from time to time been available, while their evangelical spirit has preserved for them the positive note and has kept them clear of all irresponsible iconoclasm.

As we have seen already, the earliest leaders of Independency were more concerned with ecclesiastical problems than with theology proper. They had in the first instance to justify their separatism, and they did it well. But there were among them men like John

Robinson who were far more than mere ecclesiastics. He at any rate, while keeping well within the theological landmarks of his time, made real contributions to religious thinking, and brought home the great Christian facts and truths to the hearts of men and women in a thoroughly experimental fashion. He was followed by writers like John Owen and Thomas Goodwin, voluminous and prolix according to our modern standards, yet never without knowledge of, and concern for, the real needs of fallen human nature. The general framework of their systems was, of course, more or less rigidly Calvinistic, yet in their practical presentation of Christian truth they provided the basis for that modified form of Calvinism which later became the distinctive feature of Congregational theology. Even at this early period, an evangelical temper mitigated the harshness of the strict Calvinistic position. The men were better than their creed, and in the Churches generally the revolt against Calvinism tended to become a revolt against the whole doctrinal presentation of religion. The frank Arminianism of John Goodwin was exceptional, but there was no doubt an unconscious echo of it in many who, had they been challenged, would have repudiated anything of the kind.

The centre of interest in the controversies which followed was not, as might have been expected, the divine decrees and predestination, but rather the reach and extent of the work of Jesus Christ. Was the death of Jesus Christ available for all men or only for the elect? By the logic of their position Congregational theologians were bound to take the narrower view, and many of them did so unhesitatingly. Calvinism broke down on the practical issue. The evangelical revival

compelled a restatement of doctrine in which Congregationalists took their part. Indeed, that modified form of Calvinism which set forth a Grotian view of the Atonement was very largely their work.

This, however, is to anticipate. In the eighteenth century the position was somewhat different. The great names among the Independents were those of Watts and Doddridge, and they were both affected by the prevailing Arianism. Watts, indeed, worked out a Christology of his own in which he asserted the pre-existence of Our Lord's humanity, and sought thus to combat the Arian views of His person. Doddridge, too, took up a similar position, but the Arian trend was too strong for them. There was at the time no real interest in Christology. Jesus Christ was an essential element in God's plan of salvation, and there, so to speak, His function ended. Doddridge in his Academy showed men how to cultivate the devout life and maintain an evangelical spirit even when they were dominated by a negative and rather barren theology. Watts did the same kind of thing by his hymns. Some of them, of course, are sad doggerel, but there are others which will last as long as the English tongue is spoken. These did more to shape the theology of the Congregational Churches than many sermons and treatises, and by the breadth of their appeal and their assurance of God's love and care for His creatures helped to prepare the way for a broader and more evangelical religious tone.

The modified Calvinism to which we have referred took the place of the older and harsher form of the doctrine, and was very widely accepted up to the middle of the nineteenth century. But the process by which Calvinism was broken up was a very slow one. It was

quite spontaneous, as may be seen from the parallel movements of thought in America, England and Scotland, and, as we have seen already, it centred round the practical question of the saving work of Jesus Christ.

In the New England theology we have an attempt to combine a Grotian view of the Atonement with a purely Calvinistic conception of God and His decrees. God is free to pardon whom He will, and is not even bound to pardon His elect. What He is bound to do is to maintain the honour of His law. In both the Edwards, senior and junior, there is the same hesitation to limit salvation only to the elect, and the same desire to maintain the freedom of God to save or to condemn. Whether this American movement or the teaching of Grotius had any direct influence in this country is quite uncertain, but there is no doubt that similar conditions were producing similar results. The first Congregationalist to set forth a purely governmental view of the Atonement was Edward Williams (1750-1813), minister of Carrs Lane Church, Birmingham, and afterwards tutor of Rotherham College. His book on the *Cross of Christ*, published in 1792, was the first and perhaps most influential of many attempts to reconcile the absoluteness of the Divine decrees with Divine justice. It is admitted that God may give the rein to His benevolence so long as He does it in a way consistent with equity. This the Cross of Christ has made possible. By accepting the sacrifice of Christ, God has paid homage to justice, and so can "propose Christ and His benefits to sinners in general", and thus rightly free them from the consequences of their sin. At the same time the sovereign pleasure of God remains supreme, and if some are chosen and some rejected the only possible

explanation is that such is the good pleasure of God. At the same time Williams makes it quite clear that God does not will evil in the sense that He decrees any men to reprobation. This writer is a typical example of the transition to a broader type of soteriology. He is profoundly inconsistent, and shrinks, as most of his contemporaries did, from the full logic of his position. He illustrates in a most striking fashion the danger of basing Christian doctrine on preconceived ideas as to the nature and actions of God, rather than on the teaching and work of Jesus Christ. Once men allow legal and governmental ideas to supersede the ethical and spiritual in religion, it becomes possible to justify Calvinism. Reverse the process and a new theology becomes inevitable. It cannot be said even yet that theology in any of the Churches has been Christianized to this extent, and the Congregational pioneers can hardly be blamed for not going farther than they did. It is at least to their credit that they opened the way.

We have already noted that it was in Scotland that the new movement received its greatest impetus. The Haldanes retained their Calvinistic theology, but preached a free gospel for all in a way that really undermined that theology. Their teaching brought out Ralph Wardlaw into Congregationalism, and he greatly influenced the thought of the Churches on both sides of the border. His book on *The Extent of the Atonement* (1830) worked in the same direction as Williams. The framework of doctrine was Grotian or governmental, and the Calvinist view of election and the decrees of God was retained. But at the same time Wardlaw proclaimed an Atonement which was *sufficient* for all, though it could only become *efficient* in the case

of the elect, to whom the work of the Holy Spirit was confined. Here, again, we have an attempt to combine incompatible views which to us seems merely sophistical, but to the men who made it represented a real travail both of mind and heart. Among the first and most outspoken opponents of Calvinism in Scotland was the Rev. John Kirk, Congregational Minister of Hamilton. In 1842 he published *The Way of Life made Plain*, in which he contended that Jesus Christ died for every man, and that the Spirit of God strives with all men alike. The saved are they who yield to Him, while those who resist are the unsaved. This doctrine cut Calvinism away at the roots, and the fact that it met with some acceptance caused trouble. Certain Churches and Ministers were expelled from the Congregational Union for holding these broader views, and ultimately came together under the leadership of James Morison and formed the Evangelical Union. These stood not merely for a theology based on an universal atonement, but for an evangelistic spirit which did for Scotland in a smaller way very much what John Wesley and his followers did for England. To this extent Scottish Congregationalism abundantly justified itself.

In England the greatest figure among Congregationalists in the nineteenth century was unquestionably Robert William Dale, for many years minister of Carrs Lane, Birmingham. Dale was a remarkable combination of the thinker and the man of affairs. He was all his life a working Pastor, and an ardent politician and educationalist, and yet he made real and lasting contributions to theology. He stood in the line of historic Independency, and he formulated the Independent position for his own time in a way which left all the

Churches deeply in his debt. To him Congregationalism is something far more than democracy in religion. He has a very high doctrine of the Church. It is the body of Christ, the home and agent of the Holy Spirit. Moved and animated at all times by the living presence of its Lord, its function is to express His mind and manifest His power among men. Dale laid great stress on the fact of the Living Christ, the ground and source of all Christian experience both for the individual and the community. His chief contribution to formal theology, however, was the Congregational Union Lecture on the *Atonement*, published in 1875. For a long time this book remained almost a classic, and it is still studied as the best representative treatment of a form of the doctrine which, though it may now have been abandoned, was in its day a great step forward, and marked the final breach with the Calvinistic view. Dale begins with a careful and thorough investigation of the New Testament data for the doctrine, in the course of which, in spite of his old-fashioned and uncritical exegesis, he demonstrates once and for all that the early Church unquestionably accepted the fact of the death of Christ for sin. It is on the fact of the Atonement, then, that Dale lays chief stress. As to the manner or theory of it he seeks to show that the New Testament presentation requires something more than a moral-influence theory, and yet stops short of penal substitution. Dale's own reconstruction of the doctrine starts from the comparatively new angle of a very lofty Christology. Christ is the eternal Logos, and as such specially concerned with the breach of the moral law through sin, and specially qualified to serve as the representative of the human race before God.

As such He bears Himself the penalty incurred by sin and needed to vindicate the eternal righteousness, and His vicarious love and sacrifice serve as the spring of new moral energies by which the souls of men are redeemed and the whole race renewed. These ideas Dale sets forth with massive logic and great spiritual insight. The remarkable thing about his theology is the entire absence from it of anything like mere academic argumentation. Dale wrote and thought in terms of the needs and aspirations of everyday men and women. The centre of his teaching was not a creed but a gospel. Thus his doctrine of God emphasized love, power and action. He dealt with a salvation which was broad enough for all men and consisted not merely in rescue from sin, death and hell, but in a positive regeneration and a life of service and love. He preached the larger hope, not merely in tones of an anæmic geniality, but as the outcome of the love and justice of the living God. His Christology was as practical and energetic as his theology. The living Christ was the centre of his system, and to him the whole Christian life was an abiding testimony. He brought to a head and gave open expression to that new theology which men like T. T. Lynch, Henry Rogers and Baldwin Brown had long been preparing men's minds to receive. They were counted heretics in their day by the rank and file of the Churches, but time has justified them, and their pioneer work is now abundantly recognized.

Side by side with Dale stands always the name of A. M. Fairbairn, his friend and fellow-worker. Fairbairn was as thoroughly Scotch as Dale was English. Of Seceder ancestry, he joined the Evangelical Union and became the greatest of its sons. He was trained

in Edinburgh under Morison, but later found in Germany his true spiritual home. He owed much to Kant, Schleiermacher and Hegel, but built for himself on the foundation which they laid. The greatest of his books, *Christ in Modern Theology*, has a good deal of the autobiographical about it, and gives the genesis of the strongly Christocentric position which he took up. But he never cuts himself loose from history. Indeed, Fairbairn might almost be called the first English *religionsgeschichtliche*. He was certainly the first to give its proper place to the comparative study of religions and to attempt the orientation of Christianity among the great religions of the world. Hence the wide sweep, and for its time the real apologetic value of his philosophy of the Christian religion. His theology, too, had a definitely historical basis, though its general tendency was more speculative and less practical than Dale's. Fairbairn began with the Person of Christ and built on it and on the teaching of the New Testament his idea of the nature and work of God. His Christology was in form entirely orthodox, but it did what was greatly needed at the time, viz. attempted a reconstruction of Christian doctrine on a really Christocentric basis. In doing this Fairbairn combined the speculative and the ethical in a way which was novel at the time, but has since become much more familiar. The best illustration of it is to be found in his treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity. He distinguishes between God and the Godhead in the following way. Deity as God, viewed objectively, is one and shows Himself as love, power, or holiness. But viewed in Himself or from within, as it were, Deity as the Godhead is a moral society built on love, the love of Father for Son and Son

for Father. In these terms is the justification of that conception of a threefold deity which represents the highest achievement of speculative insight. Once grant this society within the Godhead and the place is easily found for a third person. This is practically all that Fairbairn has to say about the Holy Spirit. He nowhere follows the usual line of Trinitarian speculation, seeking to find in the Spirit the synthesis of Father and Son, or the return from difference to unity. This he feels is more congenial to Greek philosophy than to the Christian message, and he is content to justify the Spirit by His work of interpreting and mediating the Son. In Christology Fairbairn, like most of his contemporaries, inclined to a Kenotic position. The Incarnation involved a real self-emptying on the part of the Son of God, though apparently this was confined to the metaphysical attributes of Deity, while the moral and spiritual attributes were retained in human form. This was the solution of the speculative problem, but in his fine *Studies in the Life of Christ* Fairbairn sets forth a view of His person, which is at once more historical, more human and more ethically satisfying. It is difficult as yet to estimate the full value of Fairbairn's theological work, but there is no doubt that he and Dale profoundly influenced not only the whole Congregational ministry of their time but also the more thoughtful minds in all Churches. They represented a definite departure from the past and broke the bonds of Calvinism once and for all, and by their tentative acceptance of the historical method prepared the way for a future which they were not themselves to see. Though Fairbairn owed much to Germany, he seemed to stop short with Dorner and the mediating school.

Ritschl did not appeal to him, and to the new developments which Ritschlianism involved he was at least indifferent. This was largely due to his metaphysical bent which also caused him to overlook the importance of psychology for the interpretation of religion. This is only to say that he was essentially a man of his time, and for his time no man did a greater work. He was a fine teacher, and among his pupils are to be found men who are now teaching theology all over the world. He, like Dale, was a great preacher. Both were set for the defence of the faith. There was therefore nothing academic about their theology. It was beaten out in controversies and warmed by the daily necessity of bringing it home as living truth to the hearts and consciences of men. In style they were very different. Dale's English was clear, cogent and stately, rising at times to a kind of massive eloquence. Fairbairn as speaker and writer was involved, epigrammatic, antithetical, and capable at times of great bursts of rhetorical passion. He was immensely learned, but had the power of so using his knowledge as to make it available for the humblest among his hearers. Both men were great fighters, and modern Congregationalism owes everything to the courage and conviction with which they expounded and defended it.¹

A younger contemporary of these two men was P. T. Forsyth, and he, too, made a notable contribution to Congregational theology. A Scot partly trained in Germany, he spent most of his life south of the border, and devoted all his remarkable powers to the service of

¹ Cf. *The Life of R. W. Dale*, by his son (Hodder & Stoughton); and *The Life of A. M. Fairbairn*, by W. B. Selbie (Hodder & Stoughton).

the Churches. As a young man he had passed through an unusually severe period of *Sturm und Drang*, and had come out of it with an intensified evangelical spirit which influenced all his thought and writing. To him Christianity centred in a Gospel, and the Person of Jesus Christ could only be understood in and through His work. His work again was summed up in the Cross; and in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for sin Forsyth discovers the very essence of the Christian faith. That sacrifice consists in Christ's voluntary submission on our behalf to the judgment of God's holiness. The need for it is to be found, not in an historic fall, but in the present reality of man's individual and corporate sin. Atonement is not a process but an act—an act of God, not of man. Only God in the Person of His Son can provide a way of escape from the just penalty assigned to sin. Forsyth thus preserves the penal idea in the doctrine and connects it with the necessity of judgment, and yet strongly insists on the initiative of God's love. This accounts for a certain confusion and ambiguity in his treatment of the subject, though it is counterbalanced by the strongly ethical intention which he maintains throughout. Forsyth had a brilliant and epigrammatic style and was often at the mercy of his own clever phrases, and though he made few actual disciples, his work must be reckoned with as one of the most powerful influences in maintaining the evangelical note in the Congregational Churches.

The contributions of Congregationalists to Church history and Biblical scholarship have been quite considerable. In Church history we have the work of men like Neal, Hanbury, Waddington, Vaughan, Stoughton and John Brown, all of whom, though writing from

their denominational standpoint, made very real contributions to ecclesiastical research. In Biblical scholarship we have Jeremiah Jones, whose book on the New Testament Canon, written early in the eighteenth century, was a standard work of its time. To his name we may add those of Samuel Davidson in an earlier generation, and Bennett, Adeney and Buchanan Gray in more recent times. This last named was a Hebrew and Old Testament scholar of the first rank, and his books will live as long as the Old Testament is studied. Many other names, such as those of Pye-Smith, Henry Allon, D. W. Simon, Alex. Mackennal and Alfred Cave, might be mentioned as having been real theological teachers in their day. Were it permissible to refer to the living it would be easily apparent that they have many successors, Congregational Ministers and College Teachers, who in one or other branch of theological learning can speak with authority, and are making real contributions to constructive thinking. In this respect no denomination is being better served at the present time than Congregationalism.

All through its history Congregationalism has stood for freedom in theology as in ecclesiastical polity, and its trust in freedom has seldom or never been abused. It is true that there has been much controversy. The struggle between the left and right wings, between the conservatives and the radicals, has been pretty constantly maintained, and reached a head in crises like those of Salter's Hall, the Rivulet Controversy, the Leicester Conference of 1877, and the more recent New Theology controversy. All these have resulted, not so much in a decisive victory for either side as in a steadying and clarifying of opinion and a clearing of the ground

for further advance. It has been made quite evident that the Congregational Churches needed no fixed creed to keep them on sound and progressive lines. While individuals may have fallen away here and there, the Churches as a whole have kept their heads and declined to deviate from the straight line of evangelical faith and practice. One of their real though inarticulate contributions to religious thought has been their practical belief in the guidance of the Holy Spirit—a belief which has been abundantly justified by experience. One result of it is that at the present moment the Congregationalists are less troubled by the Fundamentalist reaction than perhaps any other branch of the Christian Church. They have, in fact, no need to be, for they are free to follow and use all the new light which they can obtain either on the Bible, the constitution of the natural world, or the formulation of Christian doctrine. During the whole of the present century the Congregational Churches have moved steadily forward to a sounder and more intelligent interpretation of the Christian facts. They have accepted the results of modern Biblical criticism, and found them to be a real aid to the understanding of the Scriptures and in no sense inimical to their spiritual use and value. They have learnt to interpret God in terms of Jesus Christ, and to read the Person of Jesus Christ in moral and spiritual, rather than in metaphysical values. The old controversies on the Atonement have for them a merely historical interest, and they are feeling their way to a restatement of the doctrine in religious and ethical, rather than in judicial or governmental language. The old Calvinistic positions have one by one been abandoned, but something of the Calvinistic spirit is

left. These Independent Churches still take their religion seriously. It is to them a matter of deep concern not merely that they should attain to the truth on the things of God, but that it should be saving truth. In other words, their religion finds its best expression in a gospel "which is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth". In this respect, as in others, they are true to the faith and practice of the primitive Church. They have now a great opportunity. The future surely lies with those Churches which make central and fundamental the free Grace of God in Christ and the experience based upon it, and which leave themselves free to interpret these things in new and living terms for every new age. Congregationalists have always insisted on the necessity for a living Christian experience as a qualification for Church membership. That is the one essential thing, but it is equally necessary to put the experience into living and intelligible speech. The task is a difficult and adventurous one. Many shrink from it and prefer to play for safety by putting themselves in the hands of some authority who will direct their steps and do their thinking for them. But that way lies neither progress, nor liberty, nor life. The old Independents discovered this for themselves and struck out boldly on a new line of their own, not counting the cost. The same task awaits us, their sons. May we address ourselves to it with the faith, courage and devotion which we praise in them, but too often fail to emulate.

CHAPTER XIV

MODERN DEVELOPMENTS

WE have traced the story of Congregationalism from its modest beginnings in the days of the early Separatists to the great achievements of the nineteenth century. We have seen how Independency has worked itself out into Congregational connectionalism, and how, while much has been changed in thought and practice, the fundamental principles on which the whole structure rests have been loyally maintained.¹ Other Churches have paid Congregationalism the flattery of imitation, and there are no Christian bodies to-day who would not admit that Church membership should be confined to Christian people alone, and who would not be prepared to grant to the people constituting the individual Church a certain measure of spiritual autonomy. Even the Church of England, through the recent Enabling Act, has paid homage to these principles which the old Independents were the first to assert in their fullness. This, however, did not exhaust their contribution to ecclesiastical politics. We have had occasion to note that Congregationalists did not always understand and were not always true to their own fundamental principles. In the days of

¹ From the first Congregationalists conceived of each individual Church as representing and being an outgrowth of the one Church. When Congregationalism is at its best the consciousness of membership in the one Church is very strong.

struggle and persecution emphasis was necessarily laid now on one aspect of their faith, now on another. It was not always possible to preserve a due sense of proportion or to take a comprehensive measure of the whole field. Now, however, when the tumult and the shouting has died down, and the fruits of victory can be enjoyed at leisure, it is very necessary that Congregationalists should take stock of their position and realize their calling. Let it be said at once that we do not believe in any divine right of Independency, nor do we claim that Congregationalism has any great material advantages over other Church systems. But we do claim that it offers a wider religious liberty and a greater opportunity for progress in the faith than any other Church. Its freedom from fixed and binding formularies¹ is an asset the value of which is being more fully appreciated in these days of theological confusion and unrest than ever before. Its belief in the guidance of the Holy Spirit and its high doctrine of the Church as the organ of the will of Christ, in sharp contrast to materialized and magical conceptions of the Church in vogue elsewhere, should appeal with great force to those who seek in their religious home not merely rest and safety but challenge and adventure. If the Congregational ideal is high, and if flesh and blood find it hard to maintain in its entirety, that is only another reason why it should receive the suffrages of all who are sincere in their religious quest. No man has a finer opportunity at the present time than the minister of a Congrega-

¹ This is not due, as is sometimes thought, to theological uncertainty, but has behind it a real religious principle. It is that it may leave men free to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Pilgrims of old covenanted to walk "in all God's ways made known or to be made known".

tional Church, and the fellowship of such a Church offers a field for Christian devotion, instruction and service second to none. This, however, requires that the members of Congregational Churches everywhere should be true to their vocation and worthy of their privileges. It is on them ultimately that the whole responsibility rests, and the only real danger in organized Congregationalism is lest it should lessen this sense of responsibility and cause the Churches to commit it to leaders and officials.

The problem which confronts Congregationalism at the present time is twofold. First, how to maintain a high degree of evangelical zeal and spiritual vitality along with entire freedom of theological speculation, and secondly, how to reconcile and adapt the freedom and independence of the individual Church to a highly centralized organization. We have now to describe the various ways in which this problem is being dealt with, and to estimate the prospect of a successful solution.

The first problem is really an educational one, and here Congregationalists stand in a peculiarly favourable position. They have always believed in an educated ministry and have made great sacrifices in order to maintain one. They were the first among the Free Churches to take advantage of the opening of the old Universities, and their Academies in other parts of the country have now developed into well-equipped theological colleges. When the Universities were still closed they formed in conjunction with the Baptists a *Senatus Academicus* which examined the students in their colleges year by year and stimulated and maintained a high standard of scholarship among them. It may be true, as is sometimes said, that in recent years minis-

terial education has not quite kept pace with the advances in secular education, but that is not likely to remain so for long. The colleges were never better equipped than they are to-day and never more conscious of their responsibility. That their standards vary and their methods differ is natural, and all to the good in a denomination which has to cater for people of all sorts. It only remains for the Churches to supply to the colleges a due succession of men really called of God and capable of the stiff discipline which the modern ministry demands. The only cloud on the horizon is the fact that just now such men are not forthcoming in sufficient numbers. It is to be feared also that the Churches are not alive enough to the need for teaching in their pulpits. They are perhaps too easily at the mercy of merely popular preaching, and sometimes too timid to recognize the need for an advanced and progressive theology. They are sometimes so taken up with the need for social application of the gospel that they are apt to overlook the fact that it is necessary to have a gospel before it can be applied. In the present distress many people are taking refuge in ritualism on the one hand and fundamentalism on the other, and even in Congregational Churches these are not without their appeal. But they prove broken reeds in the end, and the future undoubtedly lies with a Church which is free to follow the guidance of the Spirit of God wherever He may lead, and finds its ultimate authority in the living Word of God rather than in any man-made creed or system. If the Congregational Churches are true to themselves they will continue to combine the finest possible theological scholarship with an intense religious experience and a keen and earnest evangelism. In a

time like the present they have, if they did but know it, a very real mission to fulfil.

They are so far conscious of this as to realize the necessity for organizing themselves more thoroughly for their task. We have seen how the old idea of a purely isolated independency gradually gave place to a modified form of centralized connectionalism. Movement in this direction has been increasingly rapid of recent years. The work of the County Unions has revealed the needs of the Churches in small towns and country districts, and the great difficulty of maintaining pure Independency under the conditions which there obtain. The Congregational Union of England and Wales through its Council and Committees has discovered the necessity for more centralized counsel and effort. It has been found desirable for the denomination as a whole to take some responsibility for the Ministers called to serve it. For a long time efforts have been made to secure adequate stipends for Ministers, and some kind of help for those in sickness and retirement. Large funds for this purpose have been raised, but it is only quite recently that they have reached anything like an adequate scale. Through the Central Fund and the more recent Forward Movement Fund it has been possible to give substantial help to the poorer Churches, and to begin to prepare for a contributory Superannuation Fund on a more generous basis than ever before. All this means, of course, a much closer supervision of the entrance to the ministry. In theory a Congregational Church may call whom it will to be its Minister, but in practice its powers in this respect are strictly limited provided the Church is to retain its place within organized Congregationalism, and the Minister to have a share in the benefits which the

association of Churches offers. In order to safeguard the whole situation the Churches, through the County Unions, have made certain regulations for the admission to the ministry which have been adopted by all the Churches, and after several revisions now stand as follows :

All persons seeking recognition as Congregational Ministers and resident within the area of a County Union, and in fellowship with a Congregational Church, shall be eligible for membership by the vote of the Annual Meeting or of the Executive Committee, subject to the approval of the Annual Meeting, provided that :

(i) In the case of a Minister coming from a recognized College, he shall procure an official recommendation from the Governing Body, but before his name is placed on the list of accredited Ministers his ordination or recognition shall be officially certified by his County Union as having been held in compliance with (E).

(ii) In the case of an accredited Minister having held the pastorate of a Congregational Church in another County Union, he shall secure a letter of commendation from such County Union, or its Executive Committee.

(iii) In the case of a Minister from another denomination who has received a call to the pastorate of a Congregational Church, he shall give satisfactory evidence as to his Christian character, ministerial training or status, and efficiency, as to his acquaintance with and acceptance of the faith and polity of the Congregational Churches, and as to his having been a member of a Congregational Church for not less than six months, together with the official certification usually recognized in the denomination, connection with which he has resigned, before being recognized as an accredited Congregational Minister.

(iv) In the case of a man who cannot for special reasons receive the full training of one of the recognized Colleges he shall be required before being recognized as an accredited Congregational Minister—

(a) To furnish evidence as to character, efficiency and faith.

(b) To furnish evidence that he has received a call from, and has exercised the pastoral office in, a Congregational Church, or Churches with the sanction of a County Union, for at least six years.

(c) To produce a certificate showing that upon the recommendation of his County Union he has entered upon and completed a course of study as arranged by the Congregational Union of England and Wales, extending over at least three years, including the passing of annual examinations commencing not earlier than the fourth year.

(v) A graduate of a recognized University who in the opinion of the Special Committee has had no adequate theological training, and who has received a call to the pastorate of a Congregational Church, shall, before being recognized as an accredited Minister, be required to enter upon a probationary period of three years, and to submit himself to examination on a special course of study.

The provision (E) mentioned above with regard to ordination is as follows :

Inasmuch as the Ordination or Recognition of any person as a Pastor is a matter deeply affecting the welfare of all the Churches, no such Ordination or Recognition Service shall take place without the concurrence and approval of the County Union expressed by the presence of one or more appointed representatives. No ministerial member of a County Union should take part in, or otherwise sanction, the Ordination or Recognition of a Pastor of any Congregational Church without first communicating with the Secretary of the County Union, and ascertaining that such person is duly qualified.

It may be said that these regulations work quite satisfactorily, and are accepted by the Churches as a

voluntary limitation of their powers in order the better to conserve the great ends for which they exist. Among Congregationalists ordination is not the conferring of a Grace, but the recognition and ratification by the Church of the Call of God, and the commissioning and setting apart of the man so called to the ministry of a particular Church. With God's call to the individual the Church has nothing to do. That is a matter between God and the individual soul. But the Church can convince itself of the reality of the call by putting a man through a long course of preliminary study and training before committing to him the sacred charge of the Church which has called him to its ministry. There are thus four stages in the ordination process. First the man's conviction that he is called of God to the work ; second, the proof of this conviction given in a course of training ; third, the call or invitation of an individual Church ; and fourth, the solemn setting apart of the man to his work.

We come now to the latest stage in the development of organized Congregationalism, viz. the division of the country into nine districts or provinces and the appointment of nine Moderators or superintendents supported by the Union to supervise the work of the Congregational Churches in their areas. This is, of course, an entire innovation, viewed at first with much suspicion, but though only as yet in an experimental stage, one that is beginning to justify itself. Here, again, great care has been taken to secure the freedom of the individual Church—indeed, the Churches themselves are so jealous of this freedom that they are never likely to sanction anything that will seriously interfere with it ; the work of the Moderators is purely consultative and

advisory. They have no sort of authority over the Churches and can only act as and when the Churches approach them and ask them to do so. They are all experienced Ministers with a wide knowledge of the life of the Churches and a great sympathy with their needs and difficulties. As they come to know the personnel of the ministry and the character and circumstances of the different Churches, they are able to render very real help on both sides when a vacancy occurs, or when a minister wishes for a change of sphere. As the Moderators meet together at stated intervals and exchange notes about their work and districts, they become able to facilitate the transfer of men from one part of the country to another as occasion offers, always, of course, subject to the initiative being taken by some Church. The problem of the Settlement and Removal of Ministers is one that has vexed the Congregational Churches for many years, and while it cannot be claimed that the Moderators have solved it, they have at least shown the way to the solution. Much of their best work is done by giving counsel and support to Churches and Ministers in times of need and crisis. Owing to the freedom of their constitution Congregational Churches are particularly liable to difficulties caused by the clash of temperaments and by personal idiosyncrasies. Where the standard of devotion and of Christian conduct is not very high, and where differences of opinion are allowed to disturb the fellowship, a Congregational Church offers a sad illustration of the truth of the adage *corruptio optimi pessima*. In such cases the Moderator, coming as he does with the weight of the whole denomination behind him, can render very real service. Already they have richly earned the blessing of the peacemaker, and

as the Churches come to know and trust them more their usefulness in this direction will increase. Generally speaking, there is no doubt that the work of the Moderators is doing much to carry to its logical conclusion the policy of co-operation and connectionalism among the Congregational Churches. It gives point, practical expression and effect, to all that the Congregational Union was founded to achieve, without in any way interfering with the independence of the individual Church or lording it over their Ministers.

Along with all the other Churches, Congregationalists have of late years been concerned with the great question of the reunion of Christendom. They felt the force and timeliness of the Appeal to all Christian People sent forth from Lambeth in 1920, and they have taken part in all the discussions and negotiations which followed the Appeal. It must, however, be admitted that the subject of reunion does not excite the enthusiasm of their rank and file. Congregationalists have a wholesome distrust of all movements in the direction of uniformity. They are all for unity, fellowship and co-operation among Christians of all the Churches. But they cannot regard themselves as schismatics, nor do they believe that variety in the expression of Christian faith and life is ever a bad thing. What they do dislike and heartily desire to bring to an end as utterly alien to the mind of Christ is the intolerance and exclusiveness which have too often characterized Christian bodies in their relations with one another. So far then as reunion means the abandonment of this attitude and the setting up of some form of organization which will enable all the Churches concerned in it to work and worship in common, they are quite prepared to take

their part in it. They recognize that for so great an end sacrifices will have to be made on all sides, but they wish to be sure that the gains will be on a commensurate scale.

Two points especially stand out as presenting very real difficulties. The first has to do with the degree of unity in faith required from members of the reunited Church. It is generally admitted that there must be some community of belief, but the question is how it is to be secured and ascertained. It is quite clear from their history that Congregationalists will be very reluctant to submit to the imposition of any creed or creeds as standards of admission into the united Church. When it is suggested that the doctrinal basis of that Church should be the substance of the Apostles' and the Nicene creeds Congregationalists would probably agree ; always, however, with the understanding that the truths there set forth should be regarded as a general declaration of things most surely believed, but one not to be imposed as a test or condition of membership on any Church or person. History has shown clearly enough that the requirement of subscription to a creed is quite ineffective as a safeguard of orthodoxy and will not even secure uniformity of belief or teaching. Congregationalists claim to have shown that the dangers and drawbacks of theological freedom are largely imaginary, and that orthodoxy can be best safeguarded in an atmosphere of liberty. If it is true, as is so often maintained, that Christianity is a life rather than a creed, then the Congregational system which is based on a living experience of the power and presence of Christ with His people, and on the belief that such experience will from time to time find for itself fit intellectual

expression, has a certain measure of justification. Again they appeal to history to show the disastrous and deadening results of a system which sets up the intellectual framework first and expects the life to fit itself into it. The basis of all Christian doctrine is the Apostolic confession of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Given that, all other doctrines are secondary and can be worked out in various ways. If the reunited Church can be at one on the centrality of Jesus Christ, she need have no fear of the broadest theological liberty. Congregationalists are often accused of gross theological laxity and of a love of liberty which amounts to licence. The fact is that they have so profound a belief in the supremacy of Jesus Christ that all other authorities seem secondary, and given faith in God through Jesus Christ our Lord they can safely allow a large latitude of interpretation. Their experience on these lines justifies them in the belief that Christian union will be more readily attained under complete doctrinal freedom than by the imposition of a binding creed.

The next point of difficulty is concerned with the proposed episcopal organization of the reunited Church. No doubt there are many advantages in a constitutional advisory and representative episcopate; and, in their recent experience with Moderators, Congregationalists have practically admitted as much. But acceptance of what is known as the historic episcopate is a very different story. When it is suggested that all ordinations must be episcopal, it seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that this means belief in Apostolic succession, the transmission of grace, and the whole thaumaturgic machinery. Now to Congregationalists ordination is far too solemn a thing to be dealt with in this mechanical

way. As we have seen already, it rests ultimately on the call of God, and that is between God and the man so called. Given such a call, the duty of the Church is to test it by putting the ordinand under a long course of preparation and probation. If he then receives the call of a Church, and not till then, he is ordained, i.e. solemnly set apart by the whole Church for his work. Those who take the lead in this act do so simply as representatives of the Church, all of whose members are kings and priests unto God. They have no power to confer grace. They simply recognize and ratify the act of God. Men thus ordained who have made proof of their ministry for many years cannot be expected to submit to reordination. We are told that they will not be asked to repudiate their past ministry in any way, but only to accept a wider commission. Then why suggest that such commission must be by way of episcopal ordination? Congregationalists feel that they are here faced with a very real difficulty, and one that challenges the whole Protestant evangelical conception of the Gospel and of the ministry in a way that they cannot overlook.

The same must be said with regard to the relation between the reunited Church and the State. Though the agitation for Disestablishment in this country has of recent years largely died down, it must not be supposed that Congregationalists have lost anything of their belief in a Free Church in a Free State. One of the essential conditions of reunion, from their point of view, as well as from that of the Free Churches as a whole, is that the Church must be in no sense under the control or patronage of the State. To secure this in a country like England will be a task of enormous diffi-

culty. To bring it about as the result of a political move, or of ecclesiastical controversy, would be a disaster to religion. But experience in Wales and Ireland is bringing Anglicans to see the great spiritual benefits of freedom, and to make the liberation of the Church a first step to reunion might prove an eirenicon of the utmost value. Before this can come about, however, there needs to be a much greater mutual knowledge and sympathy than exists at present among Anglicans and Free Churchmen.

What, then, of the future? Has Congregationalism still a work to do and a message to deliver? We believe that it has. The religious situation since the war has been one difficult to diagnose, and there is very little light on the horizon yet. The cleavage between the younger and older adherents of the Churches is serious. There is an increasing demand for reality in spiritual things and an increasing impatience with the old catchwords and shibboleths. There is also a feeling that the Churches have too often shirked the social and ethical implications of the Gospel, and have not been sufficiently bold to think themselves through into a theology which will be at once progressive and evangelical. Now it may fairly be claimed for Congregationalism that it is particularly well fitted to meet such a situation as this, provided always that it is true to itself. Its freedom and elasticity are very real advantages which have only to be used to the full in order to meet some of the most insistent demands of those hungry sheep who look up and are too often not fed. Its high doctrine of the Church and its demand for a living Christian experience as an essential of Church fellowship should do far more for the spiritual needs of certain folk than

Catholicism, Anglican or Roman. But it is perhaps especially on the intellectual side that Congregationalism has a very great contribution to make in the present distress. While it is committed to the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ, it is not committed to any doctrinal interpretation of the Gospel. This it can work out for itself in terms of modern thought and modern needs. Any Church which has the courage to do this in a living and positive way will not lack a hearing. But it needs knowledge, conviction, and urgency, and Congregationalism must set itself more and more earnestly to train Ministers who will be capable of fulfilling so great a task. The question of the ministry is really vital. Congregationalism is sometimes criticized as being at the mercy of what is called the one-man ministry, and it is quite true that the rank and file in the Churches ought to take a larger share of responsibility and not leave things too much in the hands of their leaders. But this does not alter the fact that for the welfare of a Congregational Church the work of the Minister is all-important. To discover for this work men of the right kind who are truly called of God, to give them the best possible training and equipment, to support them adequately and leave them free to deliver their message, should be the chief concern of organized Congregationalism. That the Churches are fully alive to this need is shown by their history and actions during the whole of the last century. Another crying need is the maintenance of a high standard of Church membership. With all that may be said against it, Independency is always ultimately justified, for in the long run everything stands or falls with the individual Church. If the Minister be incompetent or

unworthy, if the Church has a low standard of life and fellowship, then no organization, however big and efficient, can save the situation. The aim of all Congregational organization, therefore, should be to increase the power and effectiveness of the individual Church as a centre of religious life and worship, a home of saints, and an instrument of evangelization. Only as it fulfils this aim can it be justified.

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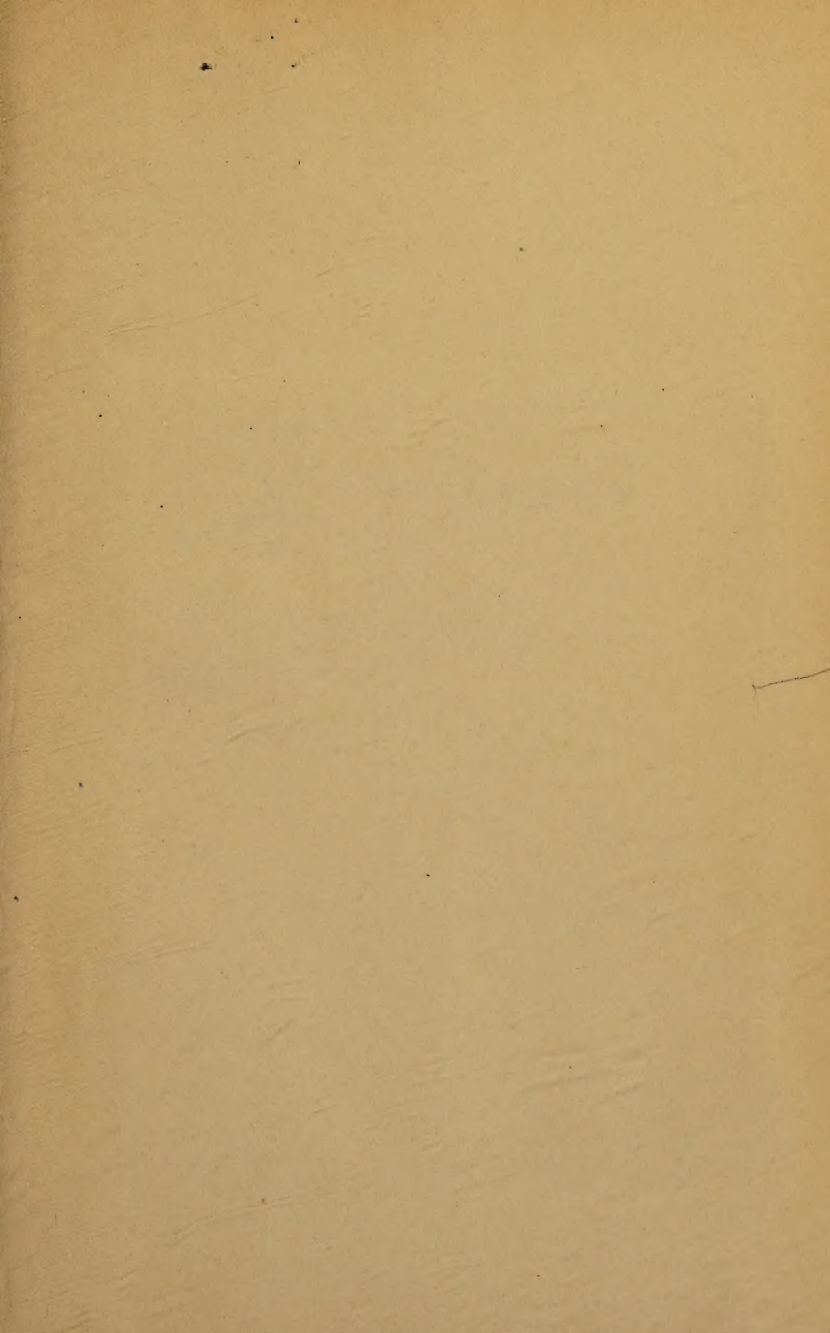
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